

Digital Fashion and Localization Strategies: an Intercultural Perspective

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Abstract

Reading the title of this doctoral thesis, one might wonder how it could be possible to connect fashion research with the adjectives digital and intercultural. *Digital Fashion and Localization Strategies: an Intercultural Perspective* aims to present the intersection of the digital world, culture and fashion when doing research in the field of communication. It proposes a series of academic research and studies related to the topic of online localization in fashion. By localization we mean the process of cultural adaptation/translation that enables fashion stakeholders to digitally approach new markets and audiences. The thesis in this direction, investigates how companies choose (or not) to modify and adapt their online contents to market their products. Moreover, it presents what can happen when localization and cultural adaptation are absent from digital media or are shown to be inadequate and thus generate communication crises.

Each chapter of the thesis presents a specific aspect of the research conducted from 2019 to 2022.

The opening section of the thesis, Part I (chapter 1), presents the theoretical framework that made possible to pursue the research by first defining the concept of communication and then presenting three specific areas of study related to it, namely digital communication, intercultural communication and fashion communication.

Once the theoretical framework has been presented, in Part II (chapters 2-3), the research guide explains how the research gap was identified and presents the research design. Part II offers a brief overview of the contents of each paper or book chapter that compose the thesis. Part III (chapter 4) presents the three research questions addressed: (i) what is online localization in fashion? (ii) compared to the definitions of localization provided in previous studies, has the concept evolved over time and, if so, how? (iii) in the digital environment, can a lack of or an erroneous localization generate crises? Of which kind? In addition, the section investigates the predominantly post-positivist epistemological approach and the methodologies used: literature review and systematic literature review, semi-structured qualitative interview, content analysis, grounded theory, thematic analysis and digital analytics.

Part IV (chapters 5-6) presents the systematic literature review and literature review, which were at the beginning of the doctoral program, to map the field of digital fashion communication and to identify the research gaps.

Part V (chapter 7) presents the topic of digital fashion in relation to pop culture. It considers the following areas: tales, magazines, photography, film, television, music, sport, and some other interchanges including gaming and museums and it offers insights into the term “pop” when related to different cultures. Indeed, within fashion what may be considered “popular” by a certain people/community may not be so for another, and this may not only lead to misunderstandings but also to communication crises.

Part VI (chapters 8 and 9) investigates localization and its interconnection with (pop)culture. It discusses how the “standardization versus adaptation (or localization)” debate has taken center stage in the communication and marketing strategies of companies and stakeholders. The continuous increase in the use of ICTs and of the Internet has led in fact, fashion companies to reflect on their digital localization strategies and to delve into how to approach new markets to avoid possible crises generated by cultural misunderstandings. The section also allows the reader to understand what fashion managers think about localization, whether they use it, and what values and declinations they provide to the concept. Part VI also serves as a key introduction to Part VII. The nuances of localization that have emerged in this section, namely localization on eCommerce, social media, and during Covid19, have created fertile ground for delving deeper into these three topics in Part VII.

Part VII (chapters 10 - 11 - 12) presents research related to localization on eCommerce, social media, and during Covid19. Regarding eCommerce, the section explores the topic of localization on eCommerce platforms by conducting a content analysis of 4 fashion brands. As per social media research, it presents the case study of the company Caruso, which launched on its YouTube channel the 3-episode story “The Good Italian” as a tool to promote its brand. Finally, it researches the localization strategies implemented by fashion brands on Instagram during the Covid19 pandemic by conducting a content analysis on 25 selected fashion companies.

Part VIII (chapters 13-14) aims to address communication crises that have occurred due to intercultural communication misunderstandings in the fashion environment. It deals with the case of Donata Meirelles, former editor-in-chief of Vogue Brasil, who had to resign from her role after she was accused on social media of organizing a “slavery”-themed birthday party. Many social media users in fact, interpreted the choice of party theme as a racist allusion to the colonial era, when Brasil heavily relied on slave labor. The second section of Part VIII presents other intercultural communication crises that have occurred in fashion and have been further amplified by the digital environment.

Finally, Part IX (chapter 15) presents the results of this thesis by providing an answer to the three main research questions, by reflecting on managerial implications, possible limitations, and future developments. On one side this thesis can be considered an added value to studies dealing with localization and intercultural communication since it provides a more comprehensive, balanced, and grounded picture on the topic, and on the other, it can be considered a useful tool for practitioners who wish to implement an appropriate localization strategy and want to have a deeper understanding of the aspects related to intercultural communication to avoid crises or, if they occur, to address them in a timely and appropriate manner.

Members of the Jury

Professor Thomai Serdari – external reviewer

Professor Basile Zimmermann – external reviewer

Professor Jolanta Drzewiecka – president

Professor Lorenzo Cantoni – supervisor

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I do not think doctoral students are well known for their creative and artistic gifts. Writing original and meaningful acknowledgements seemed to me an even more difficult task than writing these thesis pages.

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1. Communication: An Introduction

The root of the word “communication” in Latin is *communicare*, which means to share, or to make common (Weekley, 1967). In fact, the act of communication is meant to convey information and messages to someone. According to a central idea of Watzlawick's work (1967), it is commonly accepted, however, that “it is not possible not to communicate”. Even when inefficient, communication is communication. To refuse to communicate is to communicate that one does not want to communicate.

Over the years numerous theories concerning communication have succeeded and influenced each other, but the ones, that gave rise to my theoretical background and on which this doctoral dissertation is based, derive mainly from the studies of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), Karl Bühler (1879-1963) and Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) that accompanied my undergraduate studies.

Starting from the first author, the research of Ferdinand De Saussure can be easily traced, in its essential structure, to three dichotomies: langue/parole, signifier/signified, synchronic/diachronic (for the purpose of the thesis presentation we will consider only the first two dichotomies).

In Saussure's view, language is a system of signs (They are a two-sided psychic entity combining a concept and an acoustic image) that express ideas. He hypothesizes the existence of a general science of social signs, which he christens with the name “semiology”. According to Saussure (1978), semiology studies signs, whether verbal or nonverbal (writing, the alphabet of the deaf and dumb, symbolic rituals, military signals, and so on), and linguistics as a science dealing with the “verbal sign” is also part of it. He explains that the linguistic sign, far from joining a “thing” to a “name”, joins a “concept” to a “linguistic image”. On this assumption, Saussure distinguishes between “signified” and “signifier”.

The signified is what the sign expresses; the signifier is the medium used to express the meaning (the acoustic image). But the signified and the signifier are not separable: as Saussure explains, they are like the two sides of the same sheet. But while they are inseparable, the relationship between the two is arbitrary: this is demonstrated by the

fact that different languages use different signifiers to express the same meaning (e.g., dog), (cane in Italian, chien in French, and so on). In addition to defining the concepts of signifier and signified Saussure also defines “langue” and “parole” (De Saussure, 1978).

Langue consists in the code of rules and grammatical structures that each individual assimilates from the historical community in which he or she lives, without being able to alter them. Langue can be seen as a social part of language, independent of and external to individuals who cannot create or alter it. It can exist only by virtue of contact between members of a community (De Saussure, 1978). Parole, on the other hand, is regarded by De Saussure as the individual, mutable and creative moment of language, the mode by which the speaker uses a particular code of language to express a thought (De Saussure, 1978:24).

Langue and parole are intimately related: “langue is necessary for words to be intelligible and to produce all their effects; but words are indispensable for language to be established; historically the fact of words always precedes” (De Saussure, 1978:29). Despite their interdependence these are two distinct realities.

Karl Bühler partially drawing on De Saussure’s studies elaborates three functions of communication according to which linguistic communication can be described: expressive, representation and conative.

The three proposed functions are part of the Organon Modell, as it is presented in the Theory of Language (1934) and are a remarkable reference point for communication studies.

Bühler identifies the following three communicative functions:

- (i) The expressive function (Ausdrucksfunktion): The linguistic sign always says something about the sender. He calls the sign a symptom of the speaker since he/she always reveals something about him/herself. For example, he/she conveys his feelings or opinions.
- (ii) The representation function (Darstellungsfunktion): In his model, Bühler considers the objects and facts to which the linguistic sign refers in the context

of communication. According to this principle, the linguistic sign is a symbol for objects and circumstances. It is about the relationship between sign and object and their representation. The pure information that the sender wants to communicate is in foreground.

- (iii) The conative function (Appellfunktion, i.e., appealing function): the linguistic sign is directed to the receiver and acts as a signal for him/her. It thus has an appealing function; in that it aims to trigger a reaction in the recipient and prompt him/her to do something.

In a concrete communication situation, all three functions are usually involved. However, one of them is usually considered prominent.

Bühler's Organon model was taken up and further developed by linguists and other sign functions were eventually added. However, his model still provides a basis for the analysis of communication situations.

Based on Bühler's theories, Jakobson schematizes six basic aspects of verbal communication that are, however, also referable to other forms of communication, including those that use nonverbal language but make use of, for example, sounds or gestures.

He identifies:

- (i) A sender (or locutor, or speaker) who is the one who sends the object of sending.
- (ii) A message, which is the object of the sending.
- (iii) A receiver (or interlocutor or addressee), who receives the message.
- (iv) A context (which is the set of the general situation and particular circumstances in which each communicative event is embedded).
- (v) A code that is common to both sender and receiver.
- (vi) A contact (or channel) which is a physical and psychological connection between sender and receiver. It enables them to establish the communication and to maintain it.

According to Jakobson, the six factors of verbal communication correspond to six functions of language:

- (i) Referential function (referring to the context): A referential function (pointing to what is being talked about) occurs when, in communicating something, the speaker connects two sets of elements: words with referents, accomplishing an operation that is the basis of language, referencing. The speaker, to accomplish this process, must possess extra-linguistic knowledge that enables him/her to understand and use the phenomenon of coreference, as well as, share the code for a common textual competence.
- (ii) Emotional function (referring to the sender): An emotional function occurs when the sender tries to show, in his/her message, a state of mind, using, for example, a particular elevation or modulation of the tone of voice.
- (iii) Conative function (referring to the addressee): A conative (from Latin *conari* = to undertake, to attempt) or persuasive function occurs when the sender seeks to influence the addressee.
- (iv) Fatic function (referring to the contact): from Latin *fari* = to pronounce, to speak and from the strong degree root “φα-” of the Greek verb “φημί” occurs when one is oriented to the channel through which the message passes and wants to draw the listener’s attention to the operation of the message (e.g., “can you hear me?”, etc.).
- (v) Poetic function (referring to the message): it is oriented on the message and pays attention to the phonic aspect of the words, the choice of vocabulary and formal construction. It appears not only in poetic and literary texts, but also in everyday language (e.g., children’s language or advertising).
- (vi) Metalinguistic function (referring to the code). It occurs when there are elements within the message that define or redefine the code itself, such as asking for and providing clarification of a specific term, word, grammar of a language.

The present dissertation and in particular this chapter focus on the studies of these three authors since the paragraphs devoted to online and intercultural communication are predominantly based on the above-mentioned studies, while the paragraph *Fashion Communication: A Semiotic Approach* is mainly based on the semiotic studies proposed by De Saussure. Moreover, the last paragraph integrates the theories of Danesi (2004). According to the scholar, since the twentieth century, semiotics has started to grow into a variegated field of study, encompassing “the study of body language, art forms, rhetorical discourse, visual communication, media, myths, narratives, language, artifacts, gesture, eye contact, clothing, advertising, cuisine, rituals-in a phrase, anything that is used, invented, or adopted by human beings to produce meaning” (Danesi, 2004:4).

The three following paragraphs have as common a denominator the term “communication”: online, intercultural and fashion and present its nuances (the three elements have been listed in the order the author deems most appropriate, to help the reader better understand the process of the thesis development and of the covered topics).

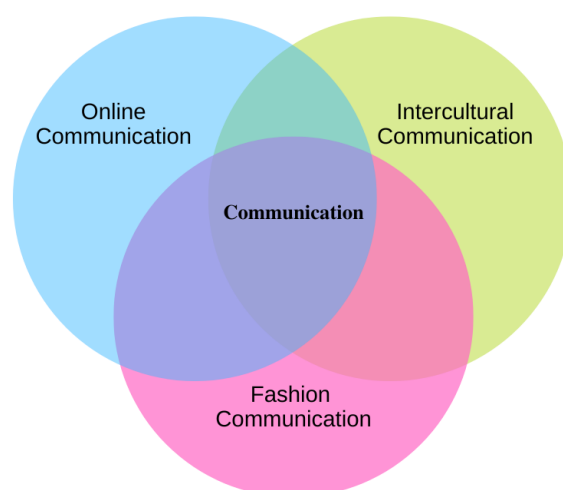


Fig.1: Where the present doctoral research is located. Source author.

1.1 Online Communication

When it comes to digital media, Garman (n.d.) thinks of them as a kind of tripod composed by the following elements: earned media, owned media, and paid media. Each element is a part of the whole: owned media are all the web properties that can be controlled; earned media are the advertising or exposure obtained by methods other than conventional paid advertising; paid media are the activities for which a company or an individual pay.

This dissertation considers online media with a focus on owned media and earned media (Fig. 2).

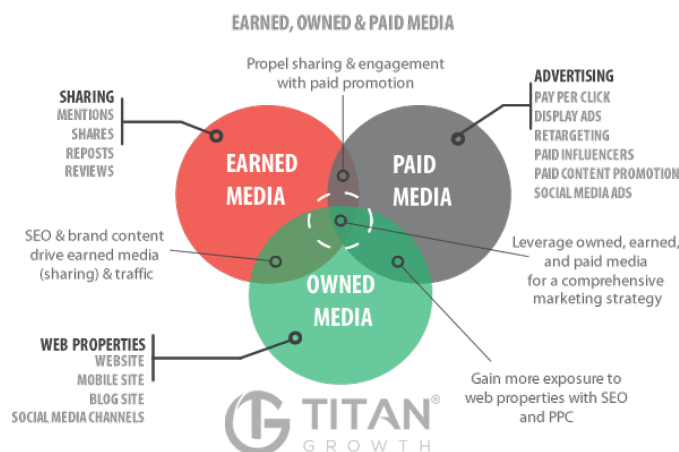


Fig. 2: Online communication. Source Erica Garman¹

The importance of approaching owned media and earned media communication, in particular website communication, taking into consideration the technological aspects and its communicative characteristics, has emerged not only at industry but also at academic level (Van der Geest, 2001). In this direction, Cantoni & Tardini (2010) present a comprehensive model that consider the various dimensions of online communication in a synchronic perspective and the processes required to design, build, manage, maintain, promote and evaluate it (diachronic perspective).

¹<https://www.titangrowth.com/what-is-earned-owned-paid-media-the-difference-explained/>

The Website Communication Model - WCM (Bolchini et al., 2004; Cantoni & Piccini, 2004; Cantoni & Tardini, 2006) - proposes such a map, and allows to frame websites/apps as communication media and it helps to better understand what is needed to manage communication assets (Cantoni & Tardini, 2006; Cantoni & Tardini, 2010).

Later, the model was more broadly adapted to online communication and no longer to sole websites. Indeed, it offers a comprehensive understanding of the different dimensions of online communication: it takes its cue from the model of verbal communication proposed by the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson. In the model presented by Jakobson, each communicative event has six different dimensions: an addresser which sends a message to an addressee, in a certain code by means of a contact/channel; and the message that is sent refers to a given context (Jakobson 1960). Similarly, the Online Communication Model (OCM) identifies five main dimensions to consider when approaching online communication (Fig.3.) (Cantoni & Tardini, 2010; Tardini & Cantoni, 2015).

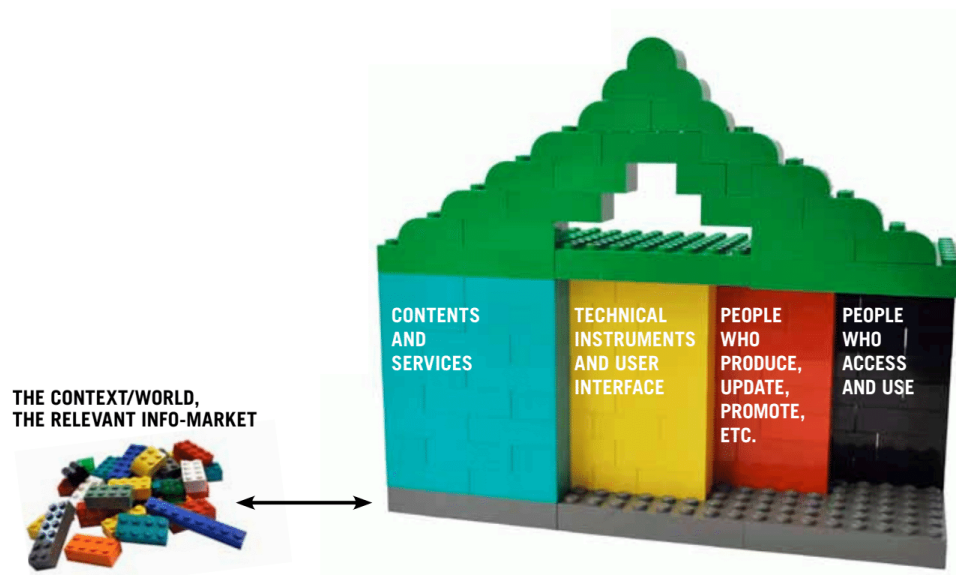


Fig.3: The Online Communication Model (OCM) (Tardini & Cantoni, 2015)

According to the OCM, the dimensions of online communication are as follows (Cantoni & Tardini, 2006; Cantoni & Tardini 2010; Tardini & Cantoni, 2015):

- (i) Content and services (Pillar I): the information transmitted, and the activities allowed downloading a document, opening a link, sending a message, leaving a comment, sharing content, voting, playing games, shopping, etc. One aspect to consider related to Pillar I is related to the quality of the information and services provided, e.g., their ability to meet or exceed customer expectations (Eppler 2003); this issue is particularly relevant in the World Wide Web (WWW) because of the ease of publishing content online. Among the elements which should be taken into account when considering the dimensions of online communication there are: information quality and architecture; the choice of a semiotic code; formats/styles of web writing; intercultural communication aspects and localization strategies; benchmarking activities; online services and arguments design; ethical aspects of/in communication (Halabi & Zimmermann, 2019; Tardini & Cantoni; 2015; Zimmermann, 2011).
- (ii) Accessibility tools (Pillar II): The channel through which messages are sent, all the elements needed to make content and services available (Pillar I elements). For example, hardware (computers, tablets, phones), software (operating system, browsers, versions), user interface, connectivity, publication points, etc.
- (iii) It includes all people involved in the publication of contents/services (Pillar III). From those who conceive the idea, to those who design, implement, test, promote, advertise and evaluate, to those who interact with users.
- (iv) It includes all the people who access the published messages (Pillar IV): the issue of visitors to a website/online content is fundamental in the WWW, as in any other communication, and is closely linked to two key activities: the analysis of usability, e.g., the extent to which an online content “can be used by certain users to achieve certain goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a given context of use” (ISO,

11:1998); the analysis of the actual uses of a web content: for example, through the analysis of a website's log files or other means, many relevant communication insights can be gathered, such as which content or services were accessed most frequently, how long visitors stay on a given piece of content, when and from where they link, through which keywords users found the web page, and so on. As it can be understood, these insights are crucial, for example, for planning all promotional activities on the website/social media. Another aspect to be mentioned, in the so-called web2.0, is the fact that users become quite easily publishers – while producing UGC (User Generated Contents) so the border in-between Pillar III and IV blurs, contributing to the cocreation of the online representation of companies and institutions.

- (v) The fifth element, the context/market, in which the online communication is immersed, influences all other Pillars (although the context of an online communication can only be partially associated with Jakobson's context).

The dimension that the OCM does not consider is “code”, which in online communication has a dual nature: it refers both to the natural language or semiotic code in which the message is published and to the programming language in which the website is developed, and in this case can be assigned to the second Pillar.

This dissertation touches more or less intensively all the 5 Pillars above mentioned: the content and services offered by fashion companies on eCommerce and social media will be analyzed with a focus on localization (Pillar I); the media channels through which messages are sent will be considered with a particular attention on owned media (eCommerce and social media) (Pillar II); people involved in the publication of contents/people who publish the communication itself, will also be considered (Pillar III), in the thesis managers who choose the contents and how to approach new markets will be considered; as for the recipients of a website/online content in this thesis they will be taken into analysis only when they misunderstand or negatively interpret a message giving rise

to communication crises (Pillar IV); within this thesis the context is given by the markets of the various countries considered (fifth element).

1.2 Intercultural Communication and Crises in Communication

When thinking about the concept of culture, there is no consensus, and no single definition of the term can be proposed.

Keessing (1974:89) defines culture not so much as a system of symbols put together but as a system of knowledge, that it is shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes and processes certain information and creates internal models of reality.

Hofstede (1991:5) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”. Moreover, in the 1990s, Hofstede published results of his research related to culture in *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* in which he proposes that each culture is characterized by higher or lower levels of the following 5 cultural dimensions: power-distance; collectivism vs. individualism; femininity vs. masculinity; uncertainty avoidance; long- vs. short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1991).

Hall (1959:169), on the other hand, equates culture to communication by stating that “Culture is Communication and Communication is Culture”. Furthermore, the scholar explains that culture has three main characteristics: it is not innate but must be learned; the different nuances of a culture are interconnected, so when one cultural aspect is touched, everything else related to it will be affected; it is commonly shared, defining the boundaries between different groups (1976). When these three main characteristics are considered, the importance of cultural understanding in such an increasingly interconnected and globalized society becomes clear. According to Hall (1976) cultures can be differentiate basing them on a bipolar dimension indicated with the terms Low-versus High-context. According to the theory (Hall, 1976; Hall & Hall, 1990), different cultures have different ways of communicating; some communicate explicitly (low-context culture) and directly, while others (high-context) communicate implicitly and

indirectly by combining verbal communication with nonverbal elements such as body language.

According to Magu (2015), the world is characterized by ever-faster interconnections, which help people interact with all four corners of the world by crossing political and geographic boundaries. By creating and sharing cultural values, individuals and organizations create communication practices. These communication practices if mismanaged or misinterpreted can cause cultural crises, the resolution of which depends on the ability of human beings to transcend the boundaries of individual cultures from the ability to recognize and accept the many hidden dimensions of cultures (Hall, 1976).

Culture according to Hoops & Drzewiecka (2017) can also be defined as:

“a site of multiple meanings and differences that are loci of power struggles and contestations amidst daily practices and power structures. Culture is a site of mixing and fusions across borders as groups struggling for power attempt to restrict meanings, categories, and practices. Identity and its categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc., have multiple and shifting meanings that are nevertheless contingently fixed within structures supporting domination of some groups”.

Cross-cultural and transcultural communication research, which began in the 1970s, encapsulates all the nuances related to culture and correlates them with communication research. Intercultural communication generally refers to communication between people of different national cultures, but the term is often used to refer to the study of all aspects of communication and culture, including cross-cultural communication, a branch of intercultural communication, which involves comparisons of communication across cultures (Gudykunst, 2003).

The study of cross-cultural communication grew out of cross-cultural anthropological studies of communication processes in different cultures. Most studies related to cross-cultural communication tend to be comparative, and understanding cross-cultural communication turns out to be a prerequisite for understanding intercultural communication. As above-mentioned, intercultural communication studies communication between different national cultures. Some scholars, who consider culture in a broad sense, also bring within this branch studies on communication between different

ethnic/racial groups, intergenerational communication and other areas related in some way to the concepts “cross-cultural” and “culture” (Gudykunst, 2003).

Through intercultural communication it is possible to learn from social scientific and interpretive perspectives, providing a broader landscape of insights, raising questions and knowledge claims that help to broaden perspectives during research and help to stimulate collective, multi-paradigmatic and contested engagement of communities, contexts, problems and realities of intercultural communication from all possible (and often conflicting) angles. Intercultural communication signals urgencies, needs, crises and desires for connection, growth and new unions that need to be further investigated by researchers (Halualani et al., 2009).

Since the early 2000’s intercultural communication has become increasingly pervasive across disciplines, as well as, everyday discourses, bursting with new ideas and approaches (Croucher et al. 2015). One of the directions in which intercultural communication seems to be heading is related to intertwining with social media and digital technologies. One question that arises when studying social media from a cross-cultural communication perspective relates to the extent to which cultural issues found face-to-face also translate into online communication (Croucher et al., 2015; Johnson & Callahan, 2013).

In this context, globalization has led to an acceleration and simplification of the transmission of data and information through the implementation of increasingly innovative devices and software; while, it has not prevented communication crises from being generated due to the persistence of cultural and language borders (Noris et al. 2020b).

Following the advent of globalization and almost simultaneously with the emergence of cross-cultural communication studies since the 1980s, crisis management and crisis communication studies have also been institutionalized as a legitimate organizational practice in private and public organizations in many parts of the world.

This development has not occurred at the same time or in the same way in all countries and in all types of organizations (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). As it has happened with cross-cultural communication, the discipline has become a subject of scholarly research,

transforming into a new field of academic study that has proven to be very dynamic in recent years (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010).

Dubrovski (2004) defines crises as temporary, unintentional, and unforeseen, negative and critical circumstances that can endanger the existence and development of organizations. They can depend on both exogenous and endogenous situations. Exogenous are all those crises that are not directly generated by companies' choices but caused by external factors/events that impact their business. Endogenous crises are all those generated by the companies' own choices.

1.3 Fashion as (also) Communication. A Semiotic Approach²

Clothing is a form of expression of the human being, and it concerns all facets of human life, the relationships of individuals with their body as well as the relationships of the body with human society. Beside modesty and the need to protect ourselves, a main reason why we dress in specific fashions is to express ourselves and to communicate our invisible dimensions to others.

Because of the utmost importance of expression and communication in fashion, it has become of particular interest for semioticians like Roland Barthes (1973), Umberto Eco (1969) and others (Rocamora & Smelik, 2016). Clothes, accessories, and all fashion-related items can be in fact interpreted as elements of a semiotic system and do resemble to a language: this is fully evident, for instance, in uniforms, which operate as a formally defined semiotic/social code.

According to Arthur Asa Berger, "Fashion is the infinity of articles of clothing that are available in a given society and personal dress is the combination of articles of clothing

² The paragraph is taken from Noris, A., Cantoni, L. (2022). Digital Fashion Communication. An (inter)cultural perspective. In M. Danesi (ed.), *Research Perspectives in Popular Culture*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill

The book was submitted on 29 August 2021, double-blind reviewed and accepted on 28 February 2022, and published on 1 September 2022.

that an individual selects to wear at a given moment in time. We can see, then, that personal dress is the equivalent of speaking or saying something using elements that are similar to verbs and nouns and adjectives – elements such as shirts and pants and dresses and suits and shoes” (Berger, 2017: 88).

We have here two main elements of a semiotic/linguistic code: a paradigm of items that can be alternatively chosen – e.g., the different types of shoes one can wear – and a syntactic structure, which combines chosen elements in order to define a specific outfit. When we get clothed in the morning, we take then a series of decisions about specific layers (underwear, upper and lower body, shoes, hats, etc.) and combine individual choices at each layer up to completion of our final outfit.

As in semiotic/language, we have also in fashion the “zero” sign: the choice is not only about alternative items, but also between them and a “zero” item. This happens, for instance, when a person decides not to wear a tie, or to go barefoot. Social practices, more or less formalized into formal codes, are considered while taking such decisions, decisions that can be more or less in line with what we believe others expect from us. Such social practices/norms are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated every time someone gets dressed. Berger suggests the *denimization* as a process of change, which has fully renegotiated the meaning of denim; we can mention here the incredible diffusion of sneakers in recent years. While at first, they were confined within the paradigm of sport shoes, and adequate in syntagmatic relations with sport clothes, nowadays they have fully entered further paradigms, being accepted or even desired at work or in other occasions.

In fashion, like elsewhere, everything has a meaning. What should not be forgotten, is that we dress (also) for functional reasons, and that fashion items are much more expensive than words ... “The language of dress is much more limited than language itself, since we have an almost unlimited number of words at our disposal while our personal dress is limited to the clothes that we have purchased (or that we can afford). And words do not go out of fashion as quickly as clothes” (Berger, 2017: 89); thus, an extensive and

comprehensive grammar of fashion, the same we have for languages, is not possible (Svendsen, 2006).

A poor person, who dresses with the only items he has, is not doing so *because* he wants to communicate that he is poor; he does so because he cannot afford any actual choice, and *by doing so* he discloses his poverty.

As in languages, also in fashion some elements might change at a very fast pace (like for denim and sneakers), while others do remain unchallenged/ unchanged for several decades if not centuries. In language, for instance, while new words are constantly created (and others become obsolete), morphology remains very stable across the time. In fashion, colors, materials, models and shapes do change quite frequently, while other dimensions remain stable. Consider, for example, the fate of trousers in Europe and in western societies: they are (almost) the only shape allowed for men to dress their lower body.

While tunic-shaped items were very common in the ancient times up to the middle age, later on they have been specialized only for women or religious clothes. A similar discourse can be done for high heels: up to a certain moment they were used by men, nowadays they are used mostly by women. Of course, tunic-shaped dresses are still used by men in many geographies, and Scott men do wear kilts ... As in language, for any rule you can find several exceptions!

Fashion's communication value and potential have been demonstrated by old and new media, and have being amplified through an increasing use of digital technologies such as social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, Twitter etc.). Such amplification, in turn, has contributed to make fashion a major player within the pop culture panorama (Kalbaska et al., 2018b).

According to Kalbaska et al. (2018b) there are four main aspects to be considered when analyzing the intertwining relationship between fashion and communication. (i) Imitation: as suggested by Simmel in 1905 (1957), individuals through clothing, on one side, look for approval among the community, and on the other, try to distinguish themselves and

appear unique. Simmel believes then that fashion satisfies two human needs: the need to fit in a community/culture and the need to differentiate from others and affirm a personal identity. The need of imitation nowadays is not only utilized by higher social strata to differentiate by lower classes, or as a top-down phenomenon, where higher social classes create trends that eventually spread to the majority; it is also a bottom-up phenomenon where what is worn by lower-middle class people might become fascinating also for the élites. (ii) Appearance: through clothing people tend to express who they are also according to the occasions and the different functions they have in their lives. In this sense, in society media and social media play a significant role in determining what is acceptable and what is not also from the fashion perspective. (iii) Expression: according to authors such as Eco (1969), Barthes (1973), Lurie (1981) and Lotman (2011), fashion can be also considered as communication, a non-verbal and visual language with many different nuances. Moreover, more recently Lascity (2021) has stressed the importance of clothing and personal adornment within communicative processes. People utilize clothing at different levels: individual, intrapersonal, to help themselves to develop their sense of the self; interpersonal, to communicate with others their appearance and how they make sense of others; and at a group level to fit in with particular social groups or religious affiliation (Lascity, 2021). (iv) Prescription, imitation, influence and personal relations: all these elements contribute to create trends and determine the penetration of fashion within social life.

The internet has amplified this phenomenon and the power of these four factors has increased: influential persons (and influencers) through social media have strengthened their role and their impact on personal relations also when it comes to clothing.

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2. Research Guide

The choice to explore the topic of online localization and cultural adaptation in fashion stems mainly from two reasons.

The first one is a personal reason that has its origins in my study background of foreign languages and literatures and international management. The received education has allowed me to develop a sensitivity related to the importance of taking into consideration cultural differences with regard both to interpersonal relationships and to the world of business, specifically that of fashion. Sensitivity to different cultures and the interest in understanding culturally different facets have always been part of my greatest passions, ever since at an early age I chose to embark on a course of study focused on the study of languages. As per the interest in fashion and communication studies, which led me to the writing of this doctoral thesis, was born later, after my master's studies were completed, through the working experience as a fashion ghostwriter and digital communication and

marketing assistant. It's through such a mix of studies, work experiences and passions that I had the chance to develop an interest for the present research topic.

The second reason that led me to delve into the topic of online localization and cultural adaptation in fashion is more academic and scientific and stems from two preliminary studies performed in the field of digital fashion. A systematic literature review (chapter 5) and a literature review (chapter 6) conducted in the early stage of my doctoral program, which confirmed the hypothesis that there was a research gap in the area I was interested in. Moreover, the two studies contributed to the mapping of the research field of digital fashion.

The two studies not only helped me identify the research gap, but also show that the field of digital fashion is flourishing. Taking five databases (ACM, ERIC, IEE, Scopus, and Springer Link) from July 9 through July 15, 2019, and using the keywords “digital” and “fashion” as search terms, a corpus of 491 relevant publications was collected and analyzed (Noris et al., 2020a).

The two papers identify a classification of the search domain on three main levels: (i) *C&M - Communication and Marketing*; (ii) *D&P - Design and Production*; and (iii) *C&S - Culture and Society*. Each level has several subcategories.

(i) *Communication and Marketing* includes the following (a) *C&M: Practices* - refers to the execution of communication and marketing activities and their effects on consumers; (b) *C&M: Enabling Tools* - considers the development of tools that enable the fashion environment to enact these activities; and (c) *C&M: Societal Implications* - considers the implications on society.

(ii) *Design and Production*, understood in their broad definition, are subcategorized into (a) *D&P: Product Development*; and (b) *D&P: Process and Technology Implementation*, including in these sub-levels the creation and implementation of tangible and intangible elements/processes that are performed by both humans and machines and enable the advancement of the fashion industry.

Finally, category (iii) *C&S - Culture and Society* is divided into three sub-levels: (a) *C&S: Culture*; (b) *C&S: Education*; and (c) *C&S: Social Development* (Nobile et al., 2021; Noris et al, 2020a).

Categories	# of items	Subcategories
C&M – Communication and Marketing	255	C&M: Practices (#119) C&M: Enabling Tools (#109) C&M: Societal Implications (#27)
D&P – Design and Production	155	D&P: Process and Technology Implementation (#95) D&P: Product Development (#60)
C&S – Culture and Society	81	C&S: Culture (#53) C&S: Education (#22) C&S: Society (#6)
Total	491	

Fig. 4: Categories and Subcategories. Source Noris et al. (2020a)

Based on this systematic literature review, digital fashion was defined as an emerging field that “involves all those processes that include (i) the marketing and communication of tangible and intangible products; (ii) the development and implementation of processes that support industry progress; and (iii) the effects of digital advances on society” (Nobile et al., 2021:5).

The two studies have made possible to show that the domain is growing, attracting the interest of academics and practitioners alike, not only when referring to the *Communication & Marketing* category, which is the most represented category, but also when considering the *Design & Production* and *Culture & Society* categories, which are emerging and in which there are still several research gaps.

This doctoral thesis touches two levels of the aforementioned classification: *C&S* and *C&M*.

On the one hand, the thesis partially falls into the *C&S* category as it proposes an analysis of how culture - popular culture - has influenced fashion and how fashion has influenced and transformed popular culture. This falls under the *C&S* category, whose subcategories *C&S: Culture* and *C&S: Society* consist of a number of studies that, according to the literature review, deal with topics such as fashion heritage, culture, history, customs and tradition, religion, art, trends in the digital age, but also studies that consider how the entire digital system of fashion can interact with our society (Nobile et al., 2021).

When it comes to connecting with a specific area of cultural studies, in this case popular culture, fashion plays an active role in helping to shape the outside world, intertwining, and integrating into fields such as art, culture, music, film, sports, media, tourism, and business, creating a symbiosis with the very definition of pop culture. Moreover, thanks

to pop culture's adaptability and creativity characteristics, fashion has become the ideal place for such symbiosis: what is popular, in fact, influences all aspects of existence, including what people wear. Elements of pop culture, such as movies, television, music, etc., act as important players in moving fashion to become more "populist, popular, and public" (Danesi, 2019). The fusion of fashion with fields such as culture, business, and digital technologies has, on the one hand, created fertile ground for the development of popular trends, laying the groundwork for more pop fashion; on the other hand, it has made clear the fact that the various stakeholders orbiting the fashion world cannot disregard the different cultures with which they interface and must be able to adequately communicate their messages whether they choose to use a global voice or to localize their contents based on the needs of the various countries and/or communities with which they interface. What is considered "pop" by a certain community/culture may not be considered as such by another one or may even be considered offensive or inappropriate.

On the other hand, this doctoral dissertation partially belongs to the *C&M* category (*C&M: Practices* and *C&M: Societal Implications*), since it discusses topics related to the development of communication and marketing strategies in the digital realm. Moreover, it discusses the impact of communication technologies as a tool for researching a specific social issue and how it intersects with fashion. Fashion, through its intertwining with communication technologies, plays a significant role in shaping the society, identity and attitudes of human beings since it is itself shaped by the cultures and communities with which it interfaces. In this direction, part of the dissertation is devoted to exploring specific dimensions of fashion communication and marketing that are particularly affected by digital transformation: it discusses localization choices and cultural adaptation processes and possible crises that may result from inadequate or absent localization strategies.

It should also be noted in this section how the Covid19 pandemic has impacted the design and structure of my doctoral thesis. The Covid19 pandemic has negatively changed our lives causing thousands of deaths and restricting freedom of movement due to constant lockdowns. Even my doctoral journey was not exempt from the repercussions of the pandemic, and a large part of my research journey has been carried out at home, in smart working. In fact, the initial phase of my doctoral thesis involved a study of localization

through a usability experiment to be conducted in different countries to see if a highly localized website was better perceived than a more standardized one by web users. Due to the impossibility to travel because of Covid19 this type of research could not take place, but thanks to a cohesive and very supportive research team and to my supervisor's advice, I was able to rework the thesis design and proceed with the research presented below.

3. Research Design

The outline presented below shows how the research process was designed (Fig.5).

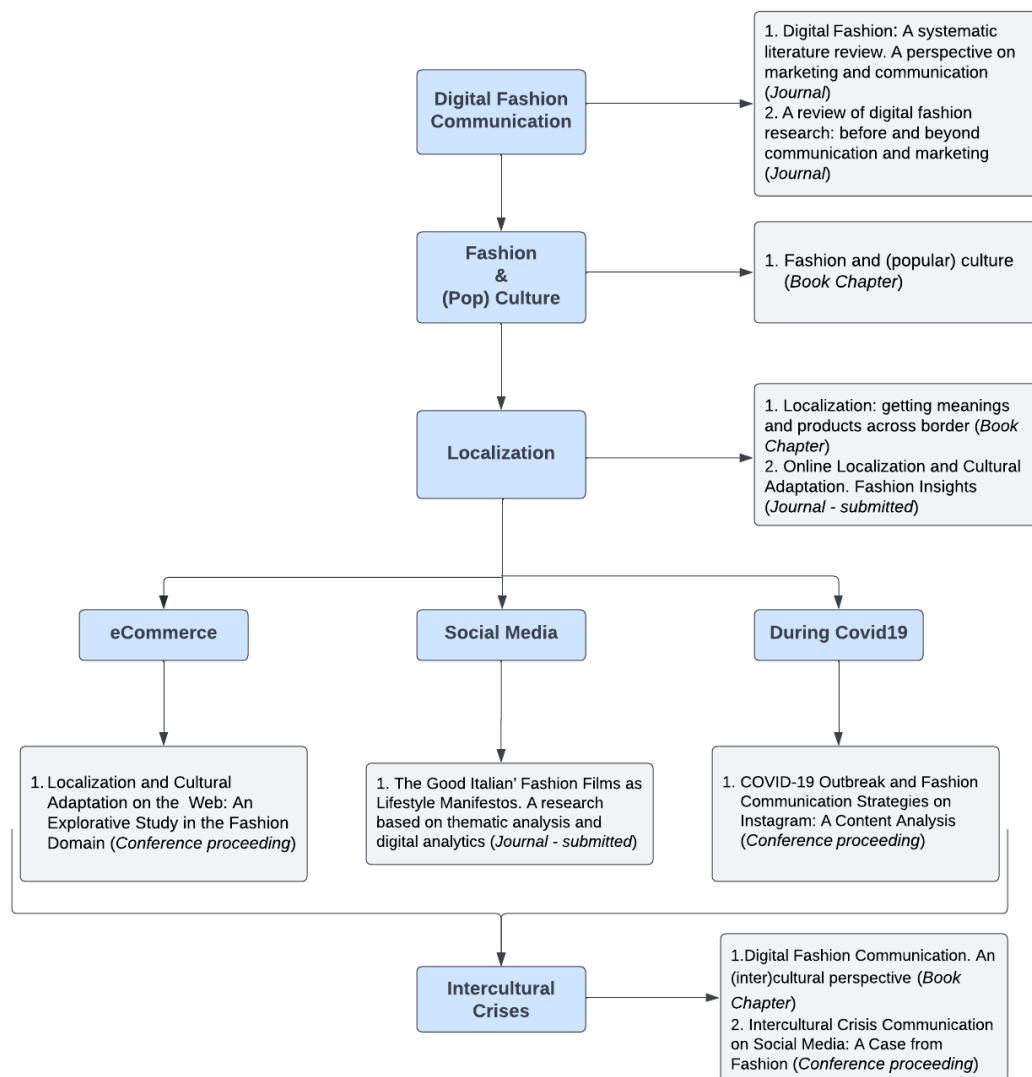


Fig. 5: PhD Thesis Design³

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1. ³Noris, A., Nobile, T.H., Kalbaska, N., Cantoni, L. (2020a) Digital Fashion: A systematic literature review. A perspective on marketing and communication. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 12(1): 32–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2020.1835522>
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First, the Systematic Literature Review and Literature Review, which were conducted to map the field of Digital Fashion Communication are presented (chapters 5-6).

Once the categories mentioned in the previous chapter have been presented, the thesis shows a more in-depth study of the categories *Culture & Society (C&S)* and *Communication & Marketing (C&M)*, in which the research gaps related to the topic of pop culture and fashion, of intercultural communication in fashion, and that of localization were identified.

Chapter 7 is devoted to defining the relationship between fashion and pop culture, specifically outlining the presence and role of fashion in the field, considering the following subject areas: tales, magazines, photography, film, television, music, sports and some other interchanges including gaming and museums. All these areas have in common that they feed (fashion's) imaginaries, create domains within which individuals' personal and social goals are presented and negotiated. Within them are found (even aspirational) models, reference points for success, (proto)types for self-identification (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

A particular attention is given to museums and exhibitions, which have not been exempt from the popularization of the fashion world: temporary and permanent exhibitions of fashion items have become a major source of attraction not only for fashion enthusiasts but also for tourists from all over the world and have proven to be an increasingly important forum for fashion brands.

Even though fashion was initially treated as the “Cinderella” of the arts, occupying a marginal place in exhibitions, mainly because of hostilities traditionally stemming from academics and because of disagreements between academics and curators on the role of museums in today's society and on “fashion” and its relationship to (popular) culture, today it seems to have established itself within art museums. Fashion seems to have found further momentum thanks to the establishment of permanent fashion museums such as the Palais Galliera Museum, the Museum Dior Granville, the Yves Saint Laurent Museum, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, the Armani Silos, the Musée Atelier Audemars Piguet, etc. (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

Finally, as further evidence of the reversal and the increasingly strategic role at the level of a cultural phenomenon that fashion has started to play, the chapter presents how UNESCO increasingly recognizes officially fashion-related practices and traditions: think, for example, of the *savoir faire* of watchmakers, or the Indonesian textile production of Batik (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

Chapter 8 presents the book chapter entitled *Localization: getting meanings and products across borders*. Within the chapter, it is discussed how ICTs and the Internet have emerged as tools of competitive advantage for all those companies that have been able to adequately exploit their potential, allowing them constant access to information by providing a 24/7 communication platform. Moreover, such tools have greatly impacted companies' communication and marketing strategies. In such a context, the debate regarding "standardization versus adaptation (or localization)" has thus taken center stage (Yalcin, et al., 2011). While proponents of the concept of standardization, which is defined in the literature as the strategy through which marketers select and operate within homogeneous global markets and in response offer standardized products and services using a standardized marketing mix (Subhash 1989; Mooij 1998; Yalcin et al, 2011), believe that technology can potentially make possible mass adaptation (Sackmary and Scalia, 1998; Yalcin et al. 2011) and the minimization of cultural distances. On the other hand, proponents of localization, which can be regarded as "the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets" (Fry & Lommel, 2003: 13) or according to Mele et al. (2016) can be regarded as "cultural translation", emphasize the complex nature of international and intercultural marketing and communication. They argue that cultural differences influence buying behavior on the Internet, further asserting that consumers prefer to purchase and interact with sites designed specifically for them and in their own language rather than within a standardized environment (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

Within the digital fashion environment, this doctoral dissertation, with the academic articles and book related to it, aims to be one of the first research to emphasize the relevance of the localization /standardization issue in the digital sphere, particularly when considering the localization of cultural elements.

The fashion field, as well as many others, on the issue of localization, although it has begun to recognize the importance of a properly designed and executed localization strategy, still seems to be in a trial-and-error phase of strategy development. Indeed, it is no coincidence that many fashion players have slipped into significant communication crises due to (inter)cultural misunderstandings.

Furthermore, chapter 8 reflects on the concept and definition of localization. For companies in fact, localizing does not simply mean adapting their marketing and communication strategies from a geographical or national point of view to meet the needs of a specific target market, but it also means taking into consideration the different subcultures, communities that make up society and external factors such as Covid19 and adapting to them.

Chapter 9 presents the paper *Online Localization and Cultural Adaptation. Fashion Insights*. Through a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews, the paper helps to understand what fashion managers think about localization, whether they use it, and what values and declinations they provide to the concept. Three different shapes of localization emerged from the paper when it comes to eCommerce, social media and the localization during the Covid19 pandemic period. Interviews with managers reveal the importance of localizing eCommerce-related content, while with regards to choices made on social media, the intent seems to maintain a certain brand consistency and brand image by taking advantage of concepts related to the geographic origin of the brand and the related cultural stereotypes, while limiting localization strategies to a minimum. Except for a few cases, the trend seems to be to use a single global voice on all social channels to communicate with their global audience. For instance, concerning the choice of social media in China, the tendency is to use local social media such as WeChat and Weibo, to reach a wider audience. Finally, the Covid19 period emerged as an outlier for managers where they had to adapt brand communication choices to the continuous lockdowns required by national governments on a local scale (Noris et al., *in review*).

In chapters 10 through 12, therefore, the study of localization in relation to the three aspects previously discussed and explored in depth during the interviews, namely

localization in eCommerce, on social media, and during the first wave of Covid19 pandemic, is pursued.

Chapter 10 delves into the topic of localization on eCommerce platforms by performing a content analysis of 4 fashion brands. The research looks at the following international fashion brands: Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo, and Zara and at three of their eCommerce web pages by country: the Australian, Italian, and Russian. The paper addresses two significant research questions: do fashion companies in the online environment consider localization and cultural adaptation strategies? Is localization approached as a mere technical aspect or also as a cultural-value aspect?

The main purpose of the study is to present the localization choices made by fashion brands considered both from a technical point of view by verifying the localization of aspects such as calendars and seasonality, currencies, models and sizes, etc., as well as from a cultural point of view. The research reveals that the cultural values identified by Hofstede et al. (2010): individualism/collectivism, power distance, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance, which, depending on the considered score of each value, characterize and identify the cultural values of each of the countries (Australia, Italy, and the Russian Federation), are poorly considered by the 4 brands analyzed. More technical aspects such as calendars, discounts, languages, products, payment methods and currencies tend instead to be considered and adapted (Noris et al., 2020b).

Chapter 11 deals with the topic of localization performed by fashion brands on social media. From the paper *Online Localization and Cultural Adaptation. Fashion Insights* it has in fact emerged the importance given by fashion brands regarding the issue of brand identity and consistency at the communication level, especially on social media. The chapter seeks to further explore the topic by considering YouTube as social media. The purpose of the study is to understand how fashion brands choose to present themselves to the public on their social media channels, how they exploit the theme of geographic origin and the stereotypes associated with it and if and how they put in act a reverse localization strategy. Reverse localization refers to that process in which companies or specific stakeholders instead of adapting communication contents within websites and social

media based on the country they decide to approach, share and utilize contents that represents the country of origin and some of the national stereotypes associated with it (Noris et al., *in progress*).

Chapter 11 presents the case study of the company Caruso, which on its YouTube channel launched “The Good Italian”, a 3-episode miniseries of the “Prince of Soragna” and his journey to the Italy of style. The chapter aims to understand how Caruso menswear has used digital technologies to create and present the three fashion films; how it conveyed its messages and objectives within the three episodes; and how it has been able to preserve its identity, maintaining its relationship with its heritage, tradition and place of birth in such a globalized and interconnected world both in terms of audience and corporate ownership. In addition, by analyzing the analytics of the three episodes, the article provides an overview of the results of the three films in terms of media presence on YouTube (Noris & Cantoni, 2022b).

Despite the importance of cultural localization of content in both geographic and temporal terms has been widely recognized by fashion brands and managers, the article shows how it is possible to balance a fashion brand’s social media localization strategy with brand identity-conscious communication that can represent the brand’s culture of origin globally. The choice of proposing in the three episodes the concept of the “good Italianism” and the idea of “Made in Italy” through the use of stereotypes about Italy derived from literature allowed the company to achieve communication consistent with its brand identity and to use elements characteristic of a certain people to communicate globally with different audiences. Finally, the case of Caruso lends itself as an example to show how fashion films can on the one hand be used to strengthen the brand image globally and, on the other, break down cultural barriers thanks to messages that convey values belonging to the brand and culture, in this case the Italian one, playing on positive stereotypes without falling into trivial or offensive representations (Noris & Cantoni, 2022b).

Chapter 12 considers the issue of localization during the Covid19 pandemic. The research seeks to determine if and when the 25 selected companies reacted on their Instagram accounts to the first wave of the pandemic, and what content and topics were proposed during the considered period.

The goal of the research is to present the state of the art of fashion digital content offered during a period of crises such as a global pandemic, in which many fashion companies decided to change their marketing and communication strategies to rebalance their usual Instagram conversational “tone of voice” with the needs and feelings of their stakeholders. The chapter shows that although the importance of digital communication in fashion is recognized by both academics and practitioners, not all the companies analyzed chose to adapt their content and communication strategies to Covid19. Overall, the content analysis somehow reveals that during the first wave of the pandemic, out of 1,758 posts analyzed, 880 referred to Covid19. The companies analyzed took nearly 18 days to post the first Covid-related content. Furthermore, the data show that less than half of the brands (12) reacted to the pandemic within 10 days from the peak Google search for each related country, 2 brands never reacted, and 11 took between 19 and 79 days to talk about it (Noris & Cantoni, 2021a). It can be, therefore, argued that when it comes to dealing with unexpected situations such as a global pandemic, which has not only increased the use of digital tools but also changed stakeholders’ attitudes toward brands, further studies are needed to increase the speed at which brands react to these unexpected situations and enable them to adapt to the changes as smoothly as possible (Noris & Cantoni, 2021a). Chapters 13 - 14 address the issue of communication crises due to cross-cultural communication misunderstandings in the fashion world.

Chapter 13 presents a relevant case study involving Donata Meirelles, former editor-in-chief of Vogue Brazil, who resigned after being accused for a “slavery party”. The woman had to resign after photos of her 50th birthday party appeared on her Instagram account and those of her guests sitting on an ornate throne and surrounded by Afro-Brazilian women wearing white dresses. Many users have interpreted the choice of party theme as a racist allusion to the colonial era when Brazil relied heavily on slave labor. Chapter 13 seeks to understand this type of cross-cultural communication crisis by considering the importance of cultural localization when it comes to communicating to different audiences on digital platforms. The results of the research carried out using the methodology of content analysis and complemented with an interview with the Afro-Brazilian women workers involved show how the same event can be covered from

different and even opposing perspectives, resulting in communicative crises. According to the attribution theory applied to content analysis, users perceived the choices made in organizing the party differently, both in terms of liking or disliking them and attributing responsibility for its failure to different stakeholders. Moreover, by also offering the views of ABAM, the association for which the Afro-Brazilian women workers involved in the scandal worked, and whose views were not considered (important) in the online debate, the paper shows that the accusations of racism may not have been rooted in a sincere interest in protecting them. In general, the chapter presents the limitations and challenges those social media users face when it comes to cross-cultural communication (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b).

In this regard it seems therefore crucial to continue research localization. It can help to reflect more in depth about what content to share on social media and how, reducing the risk of intercultural communication crises and giving those who find themselves in such communication crises the right tools to get out of them or to reduce reputational risks (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b).

Chapter 14 presents the book chapter *Intercultural Communication and Crises*. Given the scarcity of studies combining intercultural communication and crisis communication in fashion, it complements the previous chapter presenting some intercultural communication crisis that occurred in the digital fashion field, involving the following companies: Carolina Herrera, D&G, Dior, Gucci, H&M, Prada, Uniqlo, Teen Vogue, the American art collective MSCHF and Nike Air Max 97, Versace and Vogue Brazil. These cases demonstrate the need for fashion stakeholders to have a thorough understanding of cultural aspects in order to avoid crises or, if they occur, to address them promptly (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

In the chapter it is clarified that to explain crises in fashion, one can refer to the three levels of “colo”, agriculture, culture and worship, as later deeply presented in chapter 7 (Fig. 6.).

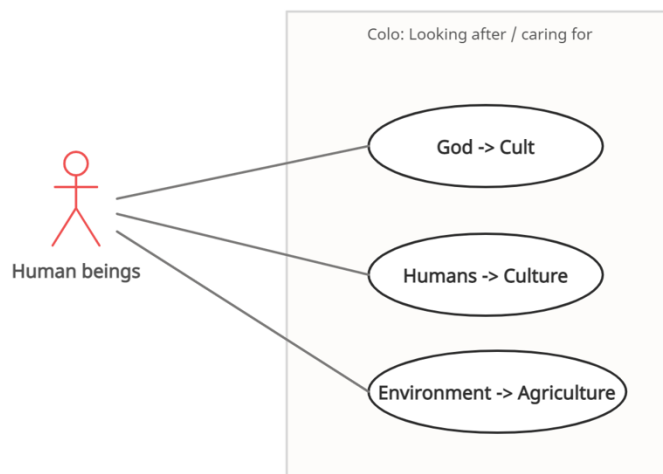


Fig. 6: Three layers of culture. Adapted from De Ascaniis & Cantoni (2022: 4)

Most of the crisis can be located in the second and third levels. Among the most frequent issues within the second layer, accusations of cultural insensitivity and stereotyping can be listed. Examples are racism, missing credits or appropriation, and disrespect for (vulnerable) groups or minorities. As for the third level, inappropriate use of religious images or symbols is the most important case. In the examples mentioned in chapter 14, it is found the case of Gucci and the Sikh community, as well as the case of Donata Meirelles, on the popular religion of Candomblé (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

The case of Versace, in which the company was accused of suggesting that Macau and Hong Kong are independent states because of their names on a T-shirt, and which led to an official statement by the company apologizing to China, could be placed in the first layer instead (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

In terms of the reasons why such crises occur, the most important one, as already mentioned when talking about localization, is the fact that content posted online is technically available to global audiences or unintended audiences, which can access and misunderstand the message and take offense. Other important aspects revealed by the chapter are related to the amplification effect of social media, along with the ease of posting, liking/disliking and sharing and the persistence of content on digital media (Karmalak et al., 2021; Karmalak & Cantoni, 2021). It also reveals how misinterpretation

of contents can also occur on purpose, for reasons other than the intent to protect a culture (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

The chapter reflects, in conclusion, on the fact that cultures are to be considered very complex “entities”: what seems correctly situated and acceptable by some may be considered inappropriate or even offensive by others. In this direction, fashion-related communication can therefore be perceived as a relevant field in which cultures are discussed: due to the visibility of fashion and all aspects related to it within popular culture (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

Chapter 4 (the next one) lays out the main research questions and presents the methodologies used to answer them.

4. Research Questions and Methodologies

This chapter presents the three main research questions, the approach used, and the methodologies chosen to carry out the studies within the various articles and book chapters.

4.1 Research Questions

The goal of the present thesis is to answer the following research questions:

1. What is online localization in fashion?
2. Compared to the general definitions of localization provided in previous studies, has the concept evolved over time? How?
3. In the digital environment, can a lack of or an erroneous localization generate crises? Of which kind?

Although the chapters of the book *Digital Fashion Communication: an (Inter)cultural Perspective* selected within the thesis follow a more interpretivist approach aimed primarily at “*grasping or understanding (Verstehen) of the ‘meaning’ of a social phenomena*” (Schwandt, 1994), a predominantly post-positivist epistemological approach was chosen to answer the three research questions. According to Ryan (2006), post-positivist research allows “truth” to be reached and constructed through dialogue; moreover, knowledge claims that are considered valid and true emerge when conflicting

interpretations are discussed and negotiated among members of a community/group. Investigations are produced by observers with different ideational frameworks, types of schooling, research experiences, perceptual abilities, etc., which influence their perspective (Fischer, 1998). In this direction, the intent is to find answers to research questions through a discursive and contextual understanding of social inquiry and not exclusively through experiments proof or verification (Fischer, 1998).

The main assumption underlying post positivism is based on the concept of the “coherence” of reality, which must detect the temporally bounded and finite character of knowledge (Brown, 1977; Fischer, 1998; Stockman, 1983)

Primarily following the postpositivist current, in light of the sociology of scientific practices, this dissertation focuses on science’s account of reality rather than reality itself. However, this does not mean that real, separate and independent objects of inquiry are not investigated by the researcher.

The adoption of such a more multi-methodological approach allows for more subtle and complex forms of rigor and enables an understanding of how different cognitive elements interact to shape what is taken as knowledge. It involves the exercise of a multi-methodological range of intellectual criteria, both qualitative and quantitative, and does not focus solely and exclusively on statistical analysis and the rules of research design (Fischer, 1998).

The methodologies are listed below in the way they seem to the author to be most reasonable and meaningful.

4.2 Methodologies

4.2.1 (Systematic) Literature review

A literature review can be broadly described as a more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Tranfield et al., 2003). An effective and well-conducted (systematic) literature review enables science to progress, expand knowledge, and develop new theories (Webster & Watson, 2002). According to Snyder (2019), literature reviews allow the integration of findings and perspectives from many empirical results by answering research questions with a power that no single study has. They also help to provide an overview of areas where research is still fragmented and

interdisciplinary and they are a clear way to synthesize research findings to show evidence at a meta-level and to uncover areas where research gaps are present, propose a critical component in the creation of theoretical frameworks and conceptual models.

In this dissertation, it was chosen to conduct both a systematic literature review and a literature review.

To conduct the literature reviews and to select the relevant research items, it was decided to follow the key steps proposed by Johnsen et al. (2017), including planning, conducting the review and reporting the findings. For both, it was decided not to limit the reviews to empirical papers, but to include conceptual papers as well. The two papers presented below, which use literature review as a research method, attempt to synthesize a rapidly growing field of knowledge, that of digital fashion.

The key steps of literature review as described by Johnsen (2017) include planning, conducting the review and reporting the results.

Five databases were used for the initial search for relevant articles, using the keywords “fashion” and “digital” - namely IEEE, ACM, Eric, Springer Link and Scopus - for 1950 - 2019. The search produced 910 results and 491 of these articles were considered suitable for the research.

These databases were carefully chosen to ensure the inclusion of as many relevant articles as possible. Because some relevant articles using alternative terminology might not be detected due to the chosen keywords, search terms were used in the title, keywords, and abstracts. This method was less efficient than focusing only on keywords, but it ensured the acquisition of as many relevant articles as possible.

The initial list was first reduced by checking the relevance of titles, keywords, and abstracts, deselecting those that were out of scope, and then each abstract and sometimes text analysis was performed.

The reviews of the literature on the digital fashion industry resulted in the following classification of the digital fashion industry: (i) *Communication and Marketing - C&M*, which produced the largest number of entries (255 entries), followed by (ii) *Design and Production - D&P* (155 entries) and (iii) *Culture and Society - C&S* (81 entries). Subcategories were identified for each category. The studies showed that the

Communication and Marketing - *C&M* category included the most published research (51.9 percent of relevant papers), while the other two categories *D&P* and *C&S* collected 31.6 percent and 16.5 percent of the research literature on digital fashion, respectively (Noris et al., 2020a).

4.2.2 Semi-Structured Qualitative Interview

Within this dissertation, a second research methodology used is semi-structured qualitative interview.

This type of interview is conducted colloquially with one respondent at a time and uses a combination of closed and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up questions about why or how (Adams, 2015). Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs) should be relaxed, engaging, and can be longer than telephone surveys, although they rarely last as long as focus groups. About an hour is considered a reasonable maximum duration for SSIs in order to minimize fatigue for both the interviewer and the respondent (Adams, 2015). Ideally, they should be conducted in person although in the case of the present dissertation conducted during the Covid19 pandemic period all but one were conducted using digital platforms.

According to Adams (2015), the disadvantages of SSIs are that they are rather time-consuming, laborious, and require specific competences from the interviewer. Interviewers must be sensitive, balanced, and agile, as well as knowledgeable about relevant substantive issues. In addition, the process of preparing for interviews, setting up interviews, and conducting the analyses is quite complex and require a long time. SSIs usually involve the task of analyzing a large volume of notes and sometimes many hours of transcripts.

Another downside, again according to Adams (2015) is that unless members of a small group are being interviewed, without a significant expenditure of time it is unlikely that SSIs will include a large enough sample to provide accuracy of the “plus or minus n percent” variety. For some types of research, therefore, standardized questionnaires on a n number of people, as well as focus groups with n number of people present per group are to be considered much more efficient than conducting individual SSIs.

However, despite the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews they also offer relevant advantages (Adams: 2015):

They are particularly suitable for when some of the open-ended questions require follow-up questions. It is useful to use SSIs when you want to investigate the thinking of individuals, if you need to ask probing, open-ended questions on topics about which interviewees might not be truthful if involved in focus groups, if you need one-on-one interviews with the managers of an institution, company, frontline staff and/or service providers, if you are looking into an uncharted territory with unknown but potentially important aspects and want to give interviewees maximum freedom to identify useful topics and debunk them.

In mixed methods research, SSIs can be useful to complement and add depth to other approaches. In this dissertation, this research methodology was used four times: in three cases as a complement to other methodologies and in one case as the sole methodology.

A semi-structured interview was used for the chapter *'The Good Italian' Fashion Films as Lifestyle Manifestos. A research based on thematic analysis and digital analytics* to interview the former CEO of the Caruso company, Umberto Angeloni, providing additional information to answer the research questions related to the function of the Made in Italy concept within the brand as well as the importance of new technologies to disseminate the brands' messages. The interview was used to further verify the hypotheses formulated and to better understand the role of such films for the company: the interviewee was, in fact, the initiator and the "soul" of the project. In this case, the interview took place in person.

The second interview took place via WhatsApp, and it can be found in the chapter *Intercultural Crisis Communication on Social Media: A Case from Fashion* in which the ABAM association in charge of hosting the party and for which the Afro-Brazilian female workers allegedly victims of racism were working was asked what their position was regarding the accusations of racism against former Vogue Brasil editor-in-chief Donata Meirelles and her "colonial" themed party.

The third interview was conducted online via Microsoft Teams, it is possible to find it within the book *Digital Fashion Communication. An (inter)cultural perspective*, and was

done with Rajanpreet Kaur, an employee of the Sikh Coalition, to discuss Gucci's choice to market on Nordstrom eCommerce a turban, which is very similar if not identical to that of the Sikh tradition without providing any kind of historical and cultural information about the product and the community it represents since centuries.

The fourth set of semi-structured qualitative interviews can be identified in the chapter *Online Localization and Cultural Adaptation. Fashion Insights* and consists of 17 interviews conducted with managers working in the digital fashion world to address the topic of localization and what it means in general for their brand to localize.

The notes and/or transcripts of the interviews were then analyzed through grounded theory that will be described in section 4.2.4.

4.2.3 Content Analysis

Regarding the methodology of content analysis, it has been chosen to use Krippendorff's (2004: 18) model, which defines content analysis as: "*A research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use*".

Content analysis is also defined as a useful technique for making inferences in order to objectively and systematically identify specific features of messages (Holsti, 1969:14).

This research method has the advantage of enabling new insights, increasing knowledge of a particular phenomenon, and informing practical actions (Krippendorff, 2004).

It provides deep insights into a situation that is not limited by existing viewpoints or methodologies, thus allowing new theories on the subject to be discovered. It is also very effective when models, which serve as the basis for quantitative research designs, are not available. Finally, the observational approach allows participants' opinions to be considered, which is impossible in the generalized view provided by quantitative research (Lai & To, 2015).

Such a method is expected to be reliable and lead to replicable results. Moreover, through it, scientific research is also expected to produce valid results, meaning that the research effort is open to scrutiny and the resulting claims can be independently supported in the face of available evidence (Krippendorff, 2004).

Although Krippendorff's definition speaks mainly of text, content analysis is not limited to written material. It can also include the analysis of images, maps, sounds, signs, symbols, numerical records, and anything that speaks to someone about phenomena outside of what can be perceived or observed.

The articles in this thesis that use content analysis also take as their starting point Krippendorff's (2004) assumption that questions the validity and usefulness of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analysis. In fact, he argues, reading texts is qualitative, even when some features of a text are then converted into numbers. For content analysis, therefore, it becomes essential not to dichotomize inescapably the qualitative and quantitative parts of the analysis since the explicitness and objectivity of scientific data processing on the one hand, and the appropriateness of the procedures used with respect to the chosen context on the other are both fundamental and therefore taken into account in the papers of the present dissertation.

Content analysis in this thesis involves the following steps: (1) selecting a topic, (2) deciding on a sample, (3) defining the concepts or units to be counted, (4) constructing categories, (5) creating codebooks, (6) training coders, (7) collecting data, (8) determining inter-coder reliability, (9) analyzing data, and (10) reporting results (Lai & To, 2015).

Content analysis was applied to the paper *Localization and Cultural Adaptation on the Web: An Explorative Study in the Fashion Domain* (chapter 10) to analyze the presence/absence of elements related to localization on the selected websites and on the identified languages. The sample consisting of four fast fashion brands Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo, and Zara compared considering three country-specific website versions such as Australia, Italy, and the Russian Federation was analyzed by classifying each category through a pre-existing model proposed by Yalcin et al. (2011). Some codes were added and/or adapted based on the peculiarities that characterize localization on websites in the fashion sphere. To perform the study, the elements related to the concept of localization that were present on the different web pages were indicated with a "+" when present and a "-" when absent.

In the case of the paper *COVID-19 Outbreak and Fashion Communication Strategies on Instagram: A Content Analysis* (chapter 12), this methodology was chosen to analyze 1758

Instagram posts written by fashion companies during the first wave of the Covid19 pandemic. In this case, in addition to verifying the presence/absence of the Covid19 topic in each post, codes were constructed from scratch to determine the topics covered when the selected sample of companies talked either directly or indirectly about Covid19.

In the paper *Intercultural Crisis Communication on Social Media: A Case from Fashion* (chapter 13), content analysis was also used. In this case, 431 Instagram posts that were written during and after the party of former Vogue Brasil editor-in-chief Donata Mereilles and that used the hashtag #doshow50 (created in the occasion of the party) were analyzed through content analysis. The objective was to identify what the network was talking about in relation to the party and therefore a series of codes were identified related to the topics that social media users were debating in relation to the party.

In all three mentioned cases, the searches have been performed only using textual contents, both on the captions and on the images, when available.

4.2.4 Grounded Theory

According to Glaser & Strauss (1967:2) grounded theory can be defined as: “*the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research*” and whose aims is “*to generate or discover a theory*”. This type of methodology requires the researcher to let the theory emerge from the data and its main goal is to generate theory from empirical data utilizing inductive reasoning called constant comparison of data. Researchers rather than developing a theory starting from a given philosophical position or theoretical conceptual framework develop their hypotheses directly from the retrieved data (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). Different forms of grounded theory have emerged over the years, among them there are classic grounded theory, modified grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory, postmodern grounded theory, and discursive grounded theory (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013)

According to Charmaz (1990, 2006) all grounded theories should have the following features: (i) simultaneous collection and analysis of data; (ii) development of categories and analytical codes not depending on preexisting conceptualizations but rather from data; (iii) inductive construction of abstract categories; (iv) discovery of basic social procedures within the data; (v) theoretical sampling to determine and further refine categories ; (vi)

predisposition of analytical memos, as a sort of intermediate passage between coding and writing; (vii) integration of categories within a certain theoretical framework.

Within the present thesis, to use grounded theory the following procedure proposed by Savin-Baden & Howell-Major (2013) has been utilized: coding, memoing and sorting. The coding procedure consists in taking notes of the core concepts and labelling them. Memoing is the phase of writing short notes which connects the aspects that has been retrieved through the data collection method. The sorting process is the third and last phase and consists in reading and re-reading the concepts to determine the categories and their interrelationships, until saturation is achieved (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013).

This method has been chosen as research methodology for the paper *Online Localization and Cultural Adaptation. Fashion Insights* to analyze the data collected through the above mentioned 17 semi-structured qualitative interviews since it allows the researcher to formulate a specific theory. In the present case it allowed to develop a theory concerning the concept of localization in fashion and how the broad definition of localization has evolved over time.

The reason for choosing grounded theory lays behind the fact that it allowed to identify the main aspects that characterize localization in fashion when it comes to eCommerce, social media and during periods of crisis such as the Covid19 pandemic. It also made possible to provide a new, more inclusive and up-to-date definition of localization.

4.2.5 Thematic Analysis

Regarding thematic analysis, template analysis was selected for this thesis. According to King (2004), it allows to produce a list of codes (“templates”) that represent the themes identified in the text. Within template analysis some of the codes are usually defined a priori but they are modified and added to the texts as the researcher reads and interprets them.

Template analysis is proposed within a range of epistemological positions. It is used in both the qualitative realist type of work and accepts much of the conventional positivist position of the traditional quantitative social sciences. Such research attempts to “discover” the underlying causes of human action and it seeks to achieve researchers’ objectivity and to demonstrate the reliability of coding (King, 2004). On the other hand,

template analysis can also be chosen as part of what is called a “contextual constructivist” position (Madill et al., 2000). In this case, such research assumes that there are multiple interpretations to be made of a phenomenon and that these are dependent on both the researcher’s position and the context of the research. In the thematic analysis no value is given to the reliability of coding; elements such as the reflexivity of the researcher, the attempt to approach the topic by taking different perspectives into consideration and the richness of the description produced become key aspects (King, 2004).

The present methodology in some cases may not be indicated as the most appropriate research method. According to King (2004) it is not suitable for analyses that aim to combine qualitative and quantitative analyses, as it might appear to produce coded segments that could be treated as mere units of analysis for content analysis. This could be problematic due to the fact that in template analysis the emphasis is on the flexible and pragmatic use of coding, and therefore it would not be advisable to assume that the frequency of a code in a text corresponds to its salience. This type of analysis might also be considered inappropriate if methodologies that take a radically subjective stance, such as discourse analysis, are to be used (King, 2004).

The template analysis method was used within the paper ‘*The Good Italian’ Fashion Films as Lifestyle Manifestos. A research based on thematic analysis and digital analytics*. The reasons for choosing this method lie in its flexibility. First, the three videos were transformed into texts, describing in detail the contents of each film: places and environments, characters, objects, sounds and music, symbols, and logos, etc. Themes were based on how the meanings and their implications were constructed, the historical, cultural, and sociological context of the films. Second, a priori codes were identified through *Studia Imagologica* (Beller, 2007), which identifies how national stereotypes emerge, what they are and to what extent they are determined by historical or ideological circumstances, or by cultural, literary or discursive conventions. Third, themes identified a priori were modified and adapted according to how the researchers read and interpreted the texts and were supplemented with new codes.

4.2.6 Digital Analytics

According to Iacobucci et al. (2019), decades ago marketing data were typically made available at an aggregate level and on an annual or monthly basis. Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, thanks to the spread of the Internet, opportunities for companies and researchers to measure website visitor interactions increased through the field of analytics. The 2000s intensified these opportunities through the continuous development of digital technologies and the speeding up of data processing and its storage capacity. The development of analytics have also influenced research in marketing and communications, allowing researchers to use web-based interactive survey tools, online qualitative analysis, mining, and analysis of large databases (Hauser 2007; Iacobucci et al., 2019). Thanks to digital platforms, companies have started to have access to large databases, which can provide information about user behavior, marketing contacts, and other user characteristics. In addition, the Internet and social media have led to an “explosion” of data, along with improved data generation and collection as well as reduced processing costs (Verhoef et al. 2016). However, data quality must always be evaluated and companies and researchers need to know how to assess the importance of analysis (Hauser, 2007).

According to Hauser (2007), data mining and analytics consist of more than technology and so-called software solutions per se. They are based on a good understanding of data and require good knowledge of database development and data quality control. Those in the field must be able to understand what is being detected by the data and interpret these results in a way that generates satisfactory results. When it comes to analytics, therefore, it is not enough to run a set of data through a software program, but it is necessary to understand the elements of the database and their meanings.

The availability of data is not enough, they have little meaning if they cannot be interpreted and used to provide an actionable body of knowledge. Traditionally, various statistical programs are run to provide complex results, but it is only through their proper presentation and interpretation that they become usable marketing and communication information (Hauser, 2007). In this direction, Hauser (2007) proposes a basic model for an elementary analytical process of digital analytics, which focuses on four distinct but

interrelated phases. The model is called MAIP (an acronym for data mining, analysis, interpretation and presentation).

In the first phase, called “M”, data are received through numerous methods or media. They can come from any source where information is requested from the user/consumer. Once the data of interest is collected, it must be verified, filtered, and organized into a single body of information for later analysis.

The second step “A” analyzes the information. This means translating a number of factors and then developing meanings or insights about the information. Sometimes it happens that one must go back to the previous stage to gather additional information to support/confirm the insights or to answer further questions generated by the analysis. In this one must consider the fact that statistical analysis, no matter how simple or complex, is only a tool for obtaining greater meanings and definitions of the situation represented; statistical data in itself has little meaning if misused or if the user does not understand how to interpret the results.

The third stage is interpretation “I” and consists of why data are collected, extracted and analyzed. The purpose is to make sense of the extraction and analysis stages and, most importantly, to create actionable intelligence from the results.

The fourth and final step in the analytics process is presentation “P”, which requires that the intelligence be structured or packaged in such a way that it can be easily used and understood.

The study of analytics was carried out in the paper *The Good Italian' Fashion Films as Lifestyle Manifestos. A research based on thematic analysis and digital analytics* (chapter 11), which used analytics provided by Caruso present on their Google account and related to the three fashion movies posted on their official YouTube page. Hauser's (2007) MAIP model was used to carry out the process. It started by collecting the data provided by the company and present on Google. Second, the data were analyzed and triangulated. Third, the obtained data were interpreted to understand what the results were in terms of performance and demographics for each film. Finally, the data were presented and made usable graphically for easier understanding.

5. Digital Fashion: A systematic literature review. A perspective on marketing and communication⁴

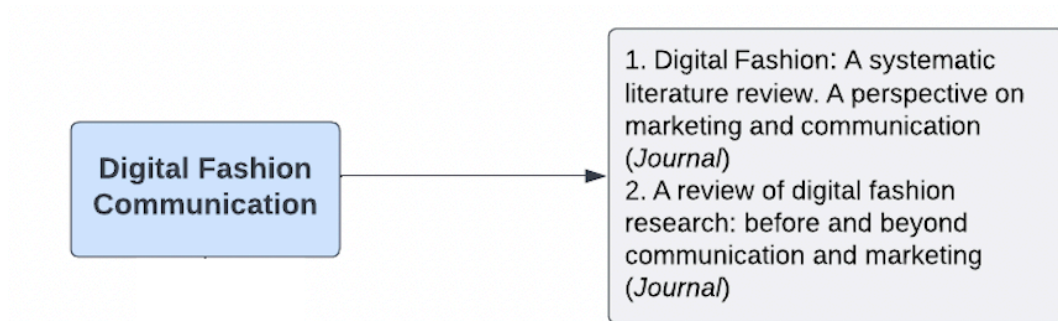


Fig. 7: PhD Thesis Design - Digital Fashion: A systematic literature review. A perspective on marketing and communication

ABSTRACT

Research in the overlapping area between Fashion and Information and Communication Technologies – hereafter referred to as “Digital Fashion” – is growing and attracting the interest of both academics and practitioners. However, due to the richness and heterogeneity of the involved fields, no map is already available of it. A systematic literature review was conducted in July 2019 utilizing the keywords “digital” and “fashion” in five research databases, including academic papers from 1998. This provided 491 relevant items for analysis. Three main categories to which those research papers belong to are identified: (i) *Communication and Marketing (C&M)*; (ii) *Design and Production (D&P)*; and (iii) *Culture and Society (C&S)*. Each category includes two or

⁴ This paper is a double-blind reviewed article and was published in the Journal of Global Fashion Marketing. The article was received on 29 May 2020, accepted on 08 October 2020, and published online on 16 December 2020.

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three subcategories. This study provides an overview of the state of the art of digital fashion studies, with a focus on Communication and Marketing related research.

1. Introduction

The globalization and the still undergoing transformation of economies and societies towards new organizational models have affected the academic field and impacted many sectors and disciplines contributing to the current debate on how digital technologies are shaping our environment; in this sense fashion as well, has not been exempt from the impact of the digital transformation, changing both the market and consumers' practices of consumption (Andò et al., 2019).

As stated by Bertola and Teunissen (2018) the fashion industry should be considered as an interesting environment in order to evaluate the implications of the so-called Industry 4.0 paradigm and of the digital transformation. Fashion is a relevant context to frame for multiple reasons: from a diachronic point of view, this sector has played a key role during the industrial revolutions that occurred during the centuries and historically it has been considered as a “design-driven” sector, where often designers and managers cooperate in order to create a brand and a successful business model, interacting locally or globally with the environment.

From a synchronic point of view instead, fashion has taken a central role in mass production (Bertola & Teunissen, 2018) and it is considered the third largest manufacturing industry in the world, only preceded by electronic and automotive sectors (Karaosman et al., 2016). In fashion, issues such as pollution, fabric waste and corporate social responsibility are crucial for practitioners and scholars, in order to reach an equilibrium between sustainability and increasing commercial pressures (Johnson et al., 2013; Karaosman et al., 2016; Kong et al., 2016).

Furthermore, fashion should not be considered as a passive sector, influenced and changed by the undergoing digital transformation, it is a dynamic field in continual progress, which impacts everyday life of individuals. It contributes to the development of commercial

activities, relationships among people, fields such as art, music, literature, culture, beauty, and many more. As stated by Kalbaska et al. (2019), it is also a matter of communication: from a more personal level fashion helps people to communicate their own identity, who they are and also who they would like to be, and from a wider level, it gathers together many communication and marketing experts, coming from different fields and having different backgrounds.

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 (Guercini et al., 2018). Nowadays, fashion can interact with information and communication technologies across different layers, concurring in the adoption of digital media and in the development of new ways of designing and producing (Rocamora, 2017), helping communities to identify practices of the self and intertwining with all the aspects involved in globalization. Although little attention has been given by scholars to the analysis of strategies utilized to penetrate international markets through the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), recent studies show how the use of internet is revealing itself as key factor for fashion companies when it comes to create an interplay between online and offline channels (Guercini et al., 2020).

Fashion actively interplays with digital media or ICTs, becoming a fertile ground for the integration of digital tools both into the fashion business and industry as well as within the experience of customers and prospects (Kalbaska & Cantoni, 2019; Soni et al., 2019). It is also a vivid research domain, including interdisciplinary studies, varied approaches and multiple research methodologies (Cantoni et al., 2020).

2. Research gap & process

Digital fashion-related studies are flourishing in many different contexts. This study aims to develop a comprehensive framework of the digital fashion field in order to describe and classify it. The goal of such classification is to provide an overview of the state of the art

of digital fashion and to support academics and practitioners navigate in such an emerging and varied field.

A systematic literature review was conducted to retrieve and to select the relevant research items. It was conducted following the key steps by Johnsen et al. (2017), including planning, conducting the review and reporting the findings. To identify the relevant papers, five databases were selected in order to account for the complexity of the domain. The research was conducted on the databases from the 9th till the 15 July 2019. The databases were selected on their expected relevancy for the topic: IEEE and ACM due to their technology and digital focus, Eric for the importance of education for the fashion industry, Springer Link for the social aspect and Scopus to identify the maximum number of papers and validate cross-database presence of research papers. Used keywords were: “fashion” and “digital”. These search terms were utilised differently according to the databases in order to capture the highest number of papers. The search was not limited to journal articles. Specialized magazine articles, conference papers and books were also considered to gain an updated view of the developments in digital fashion. Although the focus of the research is marketing/ communication, no filters were applied for the search with the aim of creating a taxonomy which reflects the interdisciplinarity of fashion, which is not limited to one discipline. When analysing books, individual chapters were considered. Titles and abstracts have been considered for the analysis, whereas, the introduction was utilised for the items with no abstract. Only documents in English were considered. The time frame considered was from 1950 till 2019. The search provided 910 results. The following section provides details of the selection process. First, the title and the abstracts were analysed in order to verify the relevance of the papers according to the keywords. Researches that were clearly not focused on fashion were excluded, for example, those that utilised the term “fashion” only as an adjective were withdrawn from the analysis. Moreover, papers that were present in more than one database were counted only once. As a result, a total of 491 bibliographic items were considered relevant for this study.

All the papers were analyzed following the categorization suggested by Kalbaska et al. (2019): ICTs in the first level are adopted to design and produce fashion items, in the second level they are endorsed to market and sell the products, and in the third level they are utilized in communication activities to shape (life)styles and trends. This analysis enabled to identify gaps, which suggested the need to further discuss and elaborate the existing categories. The papers which did not fall in one of the existing categories were further analysed to place them within new categories. This iterative process was conducted by two researchers through an in-depth analysis of the abstracts. This provided a first categorization of the documents in six categories. Through the support of a third researcher, a taxonomy (from the Greek word *taxis*, meaning order, and *nomos*, which means law or science) was developed. The taxonomy allowed a hierarchical categorization through both a bottom-up approach, ensuring completeness and (ideally) mutually exclusiveness of categories, as well as a top-down one, validating and refining the layers of digital fashion. It was then presented and further discussed with a panel of 18 participants, involving 10 PhD candidates, 4 postDoc researchers, 2 professionals, 2 professors. All of them are working/researching on the topics related to fashion communication or online communication in general. The suggestions were analysed in order to incorporate them in the final categorization and lead to an agreed taxonomy (Figure 1).

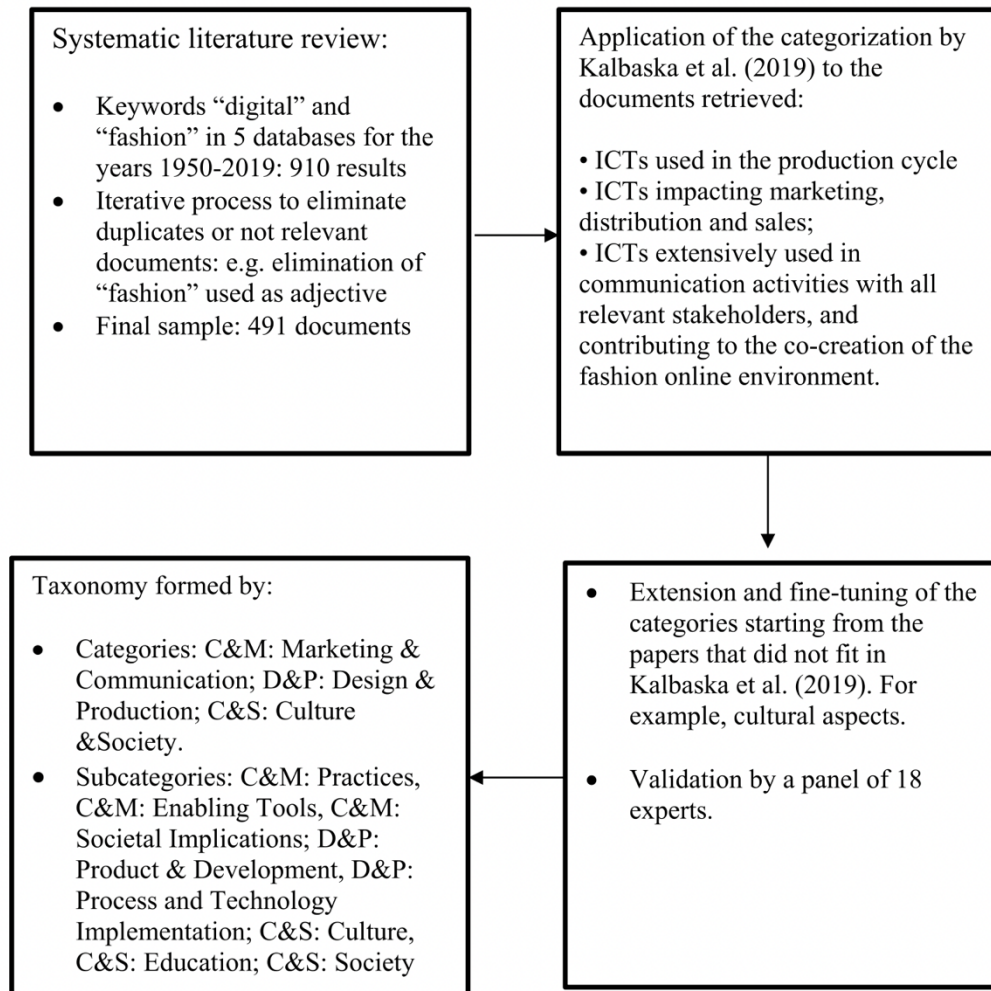


Figure 1. Process to reach the taxonomy.

The present taxonomy is the first step towards a state of the art and an effective classification of the digital fashion domain, laying the foundations for the possible development of an ontological framework of the field. It will contribute to the development of an interaction among stakeholders, which can support a further advancement of the field: its aim is to leverage semantic heterogeneity and to depict the needs of the community simplifying and improving the communication among the different groups of interest (Velardi et al., 2007). The next section presents the sample and reports the proposed taxonomy.

2.1. The sample

The time frame considered for database research was from 1950 till 2019. No study was found before 1998 (Figure 2).

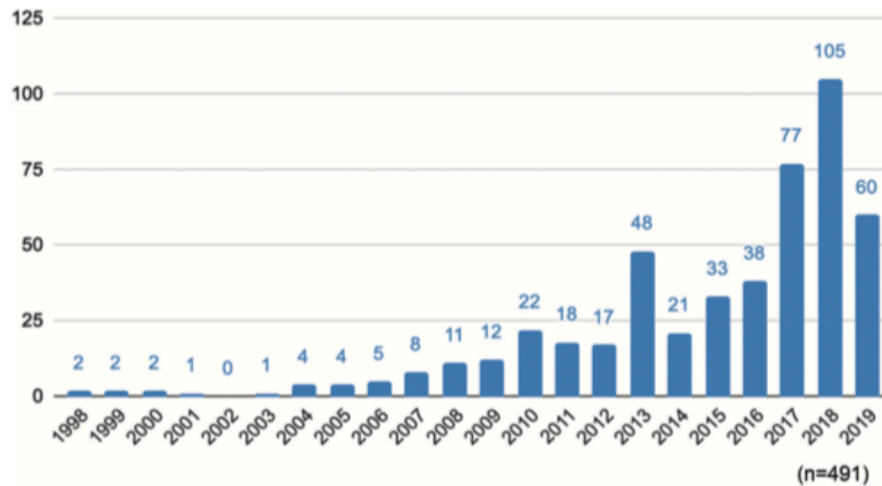


Figure 2. Papers per year of publication (The data refers until July 2019).

Indeed, as stated by Cantoni and Tardini (2006) the WWW was invented in the early 90s'. At the end of the nineties and at the beginning of the XXI century the major online and e-commerce platforms and social media arise, in line with the data retrieved from the present study in digital fashion. Within the studied period, the years 2018 and 2017 have the highest number of publications, with 105 and 77 publications respectively. Overall, the number of publications addressing the topic of digital fashion shows an upward trend, which indicates a growing interest and attraction to the topic. Data collection was done in July 2019, this explains the apparent decrease in the number of publications in that year. Assuming an even distribution of publications along the year, and a delay in their enlisting within the bibliographic databases, we might suppose that the trend is still active in 2019.

Furthermore, the consistency of the suggested trend is also supported by recent studies, which show that the chances derived from online channels are remarkable (Guercini et al., 2020; Guercini & Runfola, 2015). The majority of studies are conference papers (281), followed by the papers published in books (123), academic journals (85) and magazines

(2). The country of the institution to which the first author is affiliated has been taken into consideration. In the situation where the first author is affiliated to more institutions, based in different countries, all the countries are considered in the count. China is the country with the most publications in this field, followed by the USA, UK and Italy. Figure 3 presents the countries according to the first author's different affiliations. Only the ones with five or more affiliations are considered.

3. Categories descriptions

Three categories have been identified from the analysis, namely (i) *C&M – Communication and Marketing*; (ii) *D&P – Design and Production*; and (iii) *C&S – Culture and Society*. In fact, if we consider the number of papers belonging to each category, more than half do belong to the category *C&M* (255), followed by *D&P* (155) and *C&S* (81). A description of each of the terms utilised is provided in order to frame the categories and to offer a deeper understanding of the taxonomy, focusing on the first one, and briefly outlining the other two. Table 1 presents an overview of the categories and subcategories.

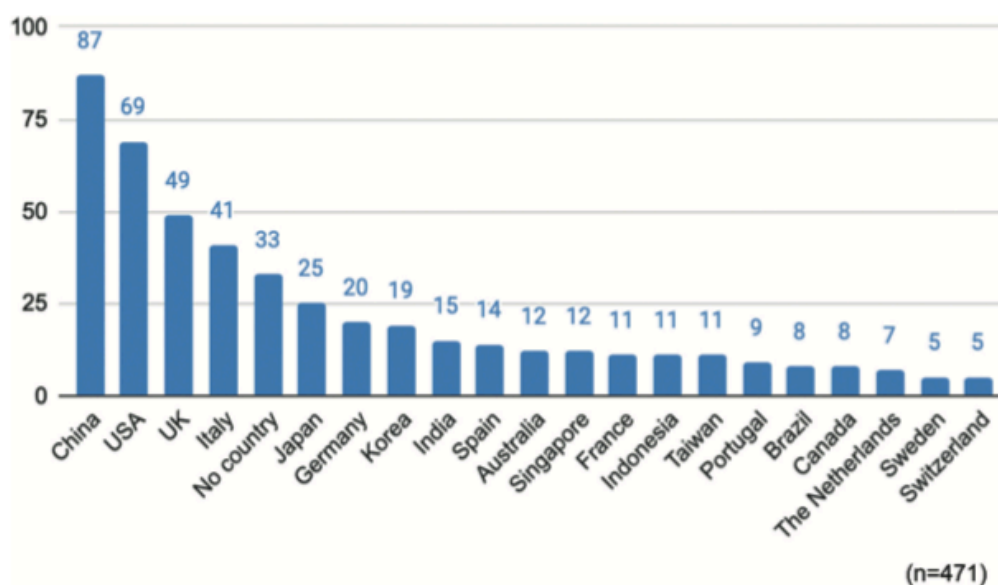


Figure 3. Countries according to first author’s affiliations (Only countries with 5 or more units are displayed. Authors which have more than one affiliation are counted multiple times. The wording “No country” has been used when the country could not be identified) (The data refers until July 2019).

Categories	# of items	Subcategories
C&M – Communication and Marketing	255	C&M: Practices (#119) C&M: Enabling Tools (#109) C&M: Societal Implications (#27)
D&P – Design and Production	155	D&P: Process and Technology Implementation (#95) D&P: Product Development (#60)
C&S – Culture and Society	81	C&S: Culture (#53) C&S: Education (#22) C&S: Society (#6)
Total	491	

Table 1. Categories and Subcategories

3.1. Category C&M – Communication and marketing

The category *Communication and Marketing* includes processes that deal with (i) the execution of marketing and communication activities and their impact on consumers; (ii) the development of tools that enable fashion entities to implement such activities; and (iii) their implications on society.

3.1.1. C&M: Practices

This includes research that discusses the development of communication and marketing strategies in the digital era involving all interested stakeholders, which contribute to the fashion system. As above discussed, the fashion industry is experiencing a time of change. From the beginning of the digitalisation, new practices in the marketing and communication field are emerging (Crepax, 2018). Concepts such as “mediatization” are introduced to analyse the relation between digital media and fashion (Rocamora, 2017).

Research to understand what consumers expect from technological advances in fashion and their acceptance of new technologies such as 3D fashion products is conducted (Agarwal, 2019). Studies that analyse how brands are dealing with the challenge of

creating a truly omnichannel strategy and how they are improving and implementing their in-store experience by introducing digital features are carried out (Perry et al., 2019; Rey-García et al., 2018).

In such a complex environment, due to the information overload and to the presence of alternative and innovative digital communication channels, such as blogs, and social media sites, which are shaping the ways in which the fashion industry communicates, attracting and maintaining consumers' attention is essential (Kristensen & Christensen, 2017). Therefore, a vast stream of this subcategory focuses on the marketing and communication strategies adopted for engagement purposes. On one hand, it discusses how brands utilize the channels to engage consumers through techniques such as storytelling (González Romo et al., 2017), on the other hand, how consumers utilize digital platforms to engage with brands (Siddiqui et al., 2019). Furthermore, a vast stream of research focuses on social media platforms, their evolution and development (Stankeviciute, 2013), their impact on fashion (Sand, 2019), their potential in building relationships with consumers through communication and influence strategies, for example, through electronic word-of-mouth, user-generated content or key opinion leaders (Cheung et al., 2019; Lascity, 2019).

Researches on Corporate Social Responsibility, crisis communication and institutional legitimacy are also discussed within the subcategory (Petkova, 2018; Sádaba et al., 2019). Particular attention is given to practices such as sustainability in the fashion sector: consumers are increasingly demanding, resulting in a societal change of increased consumption, which is creating negative impacts on social and environmental factors (James & Montgomery, 2017). A relatively new stream of research focuses on the way in which technologies can be utilized to develop an inclusive and sustainable approach in the fashion industry and generate awareness of sustainability issues and ethical behaviour (Creangă, 2019; Moody et al., 2018). The papers discuss the strategies fashion brands are adopting for communication and marketing purposes towards sustainability, such as how corporate social responsibility is communicated to engage both consumers and stakeholders, how keywords regarding sustainability are utilized on fashion brands

websites (Candeloro, 2019) and how consumers are embracing sustainability. Moreover, the negative effects of overusing sustainability claims for marketing purposes are also analysed, such as the risk of creating mistrust among consumers (Riesgo, 2019).

3.1.2. C&M: Enabling tools

This subcategory includes the development of systems, methods and models to support and facilitate the shopping experience with solutions, which involve the use of visual and textual cues (Tautkute et al., 2019), improve product search, provide personalized recommendations by using both objective (colour, brands) and subjective cues to enhance product relevance (Saha et al., 2018).

On one side, it discusses issues such as the development of avatars and virtual fittings for consumers to better understand whether a product fits (Muta et al., 2018; Polke & Kumari, 2018). It includes studies related to the development of fashion image retrieval systems with the aim of assisting consumers in the purchasing process and

overcoming the product overload issue of e-commerce through the exploitation of data and learning techniques and through systems that are as accurate as human operators (Gajic & Baldrich, 2018; Saha et al., 2018). On the other side, obtained data help to address issues related to forecasting and trend detection methods, such as colour forecasting methods, to identify consumers' preferences in multi-channel marketing through data mining (Tao et al., 2019). In this sense, the implementation of parsing of fashion images is widely addressed to predict and detect styles, to harmonize colour combinations of outfits, clothing category prediction and classification (Khurana et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018).

Recommendation systems and methods to personalize clothing are also included in this subcategory, in fact, these systems are meant to develop collaborative filtering to predict user preferences online, when data from purchase history are lacking, as well as content-based filtering, to support consumers' decision-making process, improve the customer experience and increase sales (Ramampiaro et al., 2019).

3.1.3. C&M: Societal implications

This subcategory discusses the impact of communication technologies as an instrument to analyse a specific element of society and how it interplays with fashion. As stated by Crewe (2013) material and virtual fashion are interconnected social realities that cooperate to create mutual connections, such as the effects that different communication technologies are having on individuals and communities or the shape and construction of identity through different social media platforms (Rocamora, 2015). This subcategory, even though it does not include a wide number of papers, is considered as separate from the others, because it is believed that fashion through the interaction and the interplay with communication technologies can have an important role to study and shape society, individuals' identity and behaviours (Neri, 2019).

3.2. Category D&P – Design and production

The category *Design and Production* intended in its broad meaning refers to the (i) creation and (ii) implementation of elements/processes, tangible and intangible, which are devised by humans or machines and contribute to the advancement of the fashion industry.

3.2.1. D&P: Product development

The term “product development” refers to the implementation of strategies, models and methods, which improve and facilitate the design of products and elements within the fashion environment. It concerns the automatization and digitalization of practices and processes involved in the development of products. The term “product” applies both to tangible items such as garments, make-up and jewellery and to intangible ones such as systems and databases, which contribute to the creation of tangible products.

This subcategory discusses the implementation of tools that automate and enhance the design process, the development of practices derived from the adoption of big data and networks and it includes research that develops systems for an efficient retrieval of visual information from images (Kuswanto et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019).

3.2.2. D&P: Process and technology implementation

This subcategory refers to the development of procedures and decision-making strategies, which aim to simplify business processes and solve technical issues by exploiting knowledge management as a resource in fashion organizations. The main focus of this subcategory is redesigning business efforts with innovative strategies and improved decision-making processes through effective and efficient structured workflows (Yu et al., 2011). For example, it discusses forecasting models and systems (Choi et al., 2011), the development of digital manufacturing technologies (Sun & Zhao, 2017), resource planning development (Siswanto & Maulida, 2014), and E-HRM systems (Ma, 2010).

3.3. Category C&S – Culture and society

This category includes the areas where digital fashion interacts with and contributes to (i) culture; (ii) education; and (iii) societal development.

3.3.1. C&S: Culture

This subcategory includes a number of topics that relate to fashion history, culture, religion and art in the digital era. It includes papers that provide an overview of a country's fashion industry (Aziz et al., 2019) and the impact of digital fashion on religion (Andriana, 2019), ways of preserving fashion art (Luchev et al., 2013), ethical aspects of digital innovation, the impact of consumption, fast-fashion and the need to create major awareness of sustainability among consumers are discussed (Collins, 2019).

3.3.2. C&S: Education

This subcategory is dedicated to those researches whose aim is to share, analyse and improve teaching methods in order to help students and academics in their duties. It focuses on the development of skills within schools, academies and other institutions (Lenoir, 2019).

3.3.3. C&S: Society

This subcategory broadly refers to all those studies that consider how the whole digital fashion environment can shape our society. Although it is a small subcategory, it is considered as a standalone one as it focuses on the application of the Internet of Things and its effects on society. For example, it discusses the impact of wearables, their integration in consumers' everyday life and their connection with societal issues such as safety and surveillance (Harris, 2008).

4. Discussion, limitations and further research

The present study is the first step towards a comprehensive classification of the digital fashion domain, contributing to the development of a more effective strategic research communication among the different communities and groups of interest that contribute to building the fashion environment – both in the academy and within the industry at large.

This study demonstrates that digital fashion is increasingly attracting the interest of both academics and practitioners, in particular when referring to the category *Communication and Marketing*. This interest is expected to have a further growth, as for example, the subcategory *C&M: Societal Implications* is still under researched and needs further investigation. This subcategory is expected to expand due to the increasing interaction of fashion with digital media to shape society, individuals' identity and human behaviors (Dhaoui, 2014; Gibson, 2015; Kim & Yoon, 2014; Neri, 2019).

Furthermore, the *C&M* category is expected to produce further implications also with the other two categories that compose the digital fashion field: *D&P – Design and Production*, and *C&S – Culture and Society*. From one side, it is anticipated that the categories *C&M* and *D&P* will interplay due to the increasing trends related to the production such as online fashion shows, on the other *C&M* is also expected to have an increase in the development of a relation with the category *C&S* due to the merging of marketing and communication with topics related to education and to the upcoming interest in cultural and societal trends. As an example, how online fashion communication and marketing can advance customer

experiences through, for example, personalization, localization and e-touch (Nobile & Kalbaska, 2020; Noris et al., 2020; Ornati & Cantoni, 2020).

Nevertheless, the research has some limitations: first of all, the categorization has been realised considering each identified main topic as mutually exclusive. Therefore, future studies could consider this issue in order to further develop the categorization while also examining the implications and the relations among the different layers. This could enable to suggest a more elaborated ontology of the field. Furthermore, the search of bibliographic items could be expanded to other databases and they could conclude the collection of data of the full year 2019 and beyond, in order to keep track of how the digital fashion field advances. Another aspect to be further considered and possibly improved is related to the selected language and keywords, which might be extended to include further languages and more keywords such as “wearable fashion”, “virtual fashion”, and “smart fashion”. Automatic content analysis tools could be used, in order to validate/improve the current categorisation or to propose new ones.

Additionally, future research could further study the bibliographic items retrieved by analysing the research methods adopted by the scholars. This could be valuable to identify which methods are mostly used by studies in different (sub)categories, most appropriate to advance fashion research and to reach insightful findings.

Finally, due to the Covid19 spread, the lockdown, the closure of the borders and the social distancing have emphasized the necessity of digitalization across all the fashion value chain since it appears evident that potential customers will continue to increase the demand in this space and fashion companies need to be ready to satisfy this demand (McKinsey, 2020).

A further increase in research related to the digital environment with a particular focus on marketing and communication issues and cultural aspects could be expected.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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6. A review of digital fashion research: before and beyond communication and marketing⁵

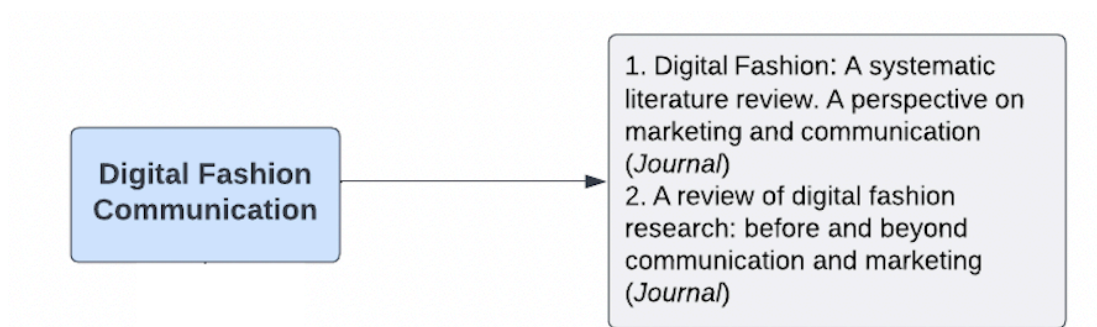


Fig. 8: PhD Thesis Design - A review of digital fashion research: before and beyond communication and marketing

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the field of digital fashion and its development by providing an overview regarding fashion design and culture. It is part of a larger research that involved a literature review of 491 relevant papers. From the analysis of this corpus, three main

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/17543266.2021.1931476>

categories were identified: Communication and Marketing, Design and Production and Culture and Society. This study focuses on the categories Design and Production and Culture and Society, which collectively gathered indicatively 48% of the selected literature. It presents its relevant studies and sub-categories, providing a rich and varied map of them and contributing to better design in further research in digital fashion.

1. Introduction

Fashion interacts with many different sectors, including culture, entertainment, finance, and information Communication Technologies (ICTs). As a result of this, it has an increasing societal impact; for instance, during the Covid19 pandemic, many fashion companies contributed to the cause by extending their productions to face masks and hand sanitisers. Furthermore, fashion groups made donations to hospitals and not-for-profit organisations to support local communities around the world (McKinsey, 2020). The pandemic has also emphasised the key role of fashion as a driver of digital transformation.

Throughout history, technological advancements have shaped the nature of fashion: the first industrial revolution contributed to the mechanisation of fashion manufacture by exploiting water and steam power, the second revolution accelerated fashion production through the invention of electricity; the third one impacted the use of electronics and information technology within the fashion environment. The fourth, the so-called Industry 4.0, contributes to shape the fashion industry through an advancement of digital technologies, such as cyber-physical spaces, Internet of Things, computing tools, personalisation, localization, and digitalisation of fashion heritage (Kalbaska, Sadaba, & Cantoni, 2018; Nobile & Kalbaska, 2020; Noris, SanMiguel, & Cantoni, 2020; Permatasari & Cantoni, 2019; Wang & Ha-Brookshire, 2018).

The digital transformation has impacted all the facets of fashion. First of all fashion communication and marketing, through the adoption of digital tools creates a fertile ground for the improvement of business and customer relationships (Noris, Nobile, Kalbaska, & Cantoni, 2021). It had also an impact on fashion design and production, for

proposing advancements in areas related to sustainable manufacturing and to the improvement of decision-making processes and HRM systems (James, Roberts, & Kuznia, 2016; Ma, 2010; McQuillan, 2020; Yu, Choi, Hui, & Ho, 2011). It also influenced culture and society, impacting education and human being's everyday life (Chun, 2011; Ebling, 2016; Harris, 2008; Ryan, 2020).

While the areas of fashion communication and of its digital transformation are emerging ones, as it appears clear also from the brief outline above, research on them still requires to be recognised and framed in a consistent way, to yield to a better understanding of the field and to open up to new and better linked research avenues (Cantoni et al., 2020; Lascity, 2021).

To move towards this direction, a corpus of 491 papers were collected through a systematic literature review. From the analysis, three main categories emerged. The category Marketing and Communication (C&M) contributed highest number of publications (255), hence it was explored separately (Noris et al., 2021). However, to provide a complete overview of all categories a dedicated and in-depth study was developed on Design and Production (D&P) and Culture and Society (C&S), as they occupied nearly half of the studies (236 publications).

2. Literature review

To present the current status of the digital fashion research domain, a literature review was conducted as it is considered an appropriate way to identify the state of the art of a topic and areas of further research (Snyder, 2019).

In July 2019 a systematic literature review of the digital fashion domain was conducted. Five databases were investigated, using the keywords 'fashion' and 'digital' – namely IEEE, ACM, Eric, Springer Link and Scopus – for 1950–2019. The search produced 910 results and 491 of these items were considered relevant for analysis. From the systematic literature review, a classification of the digital fashion field in three categories was reached (Figure 1): (i) Communication and Marketing – C&M, which resulted in the highest

number of items (255 items), followed by (ii) Design and Production – D&P (155 items), and (iii) Culture and Society – C&S (81 items). For each category, sub-categories were identified. The category Communication and Marketing was further developed in the sub-categories C&M: Practice, C&M: Enabling Tools and C&M: Societal Implications; the category Design and Production in D&P: Process and Technology Implementation and D&P: Product Development; the category Culture and Society in C&S: Culture, C&S: Education, and C&S: Society.

While it was clear that the category Communication and Marketing – C&M included the largest number of published research (51.9% of the relevant documents), covered in Noris et al. (2021). The remaining two categories collected respectively 31.6% and 16.5% of the research literature on digital fashion.

Besides such quantitative balance between the first and the other two categories, it was observed that existing studies might be also organised qualitatively, according to a (chrono)logical framework. Design and Production – D&P refers to what happens before an item can be communicated and marketed, be it a physical/digital product or a brand, while Culture and Society – C&S refers to the overall context within which fashion acquires its meaning and relevance.

Hence, this study extended and completed the analysis provided by Noris et al. (2021) on its selected biblio- graphic items, contributing to the advancement of digital fashion research by conducting a literature review of the categories Design and Production – D&P and Culture and Society – C&S.

Categories	# of items	Subcategories
C&M – Communication and Marketing	255	C&M: Practices (#119) C&M: Enabling Tools (#109) C&M: Societal Implications (#27)
D&P – Design and Production	155	D&P: Process and Technology Implementation (#95) D&P: Product Development (#60)
C&S – Culture and Society	81	C&S: Culture (#53) C&S: Education (#22) C&S: Society (#6)
Total	491	

Figure 1. Categories of published research on digital fashion. Source: Noris et al. (2021, p. 6).

3. Results

3.1. Category design and production – D&P

The category D&P refers to ‘the (i) creation and (ii) implementation of elements/processes, tangible and intangible, which are devised by humans or machines and contribute to the advancement of the fashion industry’ (Noris et al., 2021, p. 5).

The following sections discuss the sub-categories by providing explanatory examples from the studied literature.

3.1.1. D&P: product development

As the term ‘product development’ implies, this sub-category concerns the development of methods that support the design of products in fashion. The term ‘product’ refers to tangible and intangible fashion items.

This sub-category discusses novel and advanced methods for developing and implementing tools that automate and enhance the design process, including technologies that advance sketching and drawing thorough computer vision techniques and aided design systems such as 3D models and CAD. For example, the potential of disruptive technologies, to design and produce unique fashion items, was studied by Pasricha and Greeninger (2018).

It also addresses the development of practices derived from the adoption of big data and networks, such as generative adversarial learning and genetic programming that contribute to product creation, including patterns such as fractal patterns, colour forecasting and the generation of various textures. Additionally, it includes research that develops systems for an efficient retrieval of visual information from images and photographs (Dai, 2011; Dongdong, 2012; Gu & Liu, 2010; Kharbanda & Bajaj, 2013; Kuswanto, Iftira, &

Hapinesa, 2018; Lee, Lim, Jung, & Park, 2015; Li, Lu, Geng, & Wang, 2009; Liu, Zeng, Tao, & Bruniaux, 2019; Long, Li, & Luo, 2009; Muni, Pal, & Das, 2006). This sub-category presents novel and effective technologies that enable, for example, product customisation or support sustainable fashion (Pasricha & Greeninger, 2018; Wang, Zeng, Koehl, & Chen, 2014). Finally, it introduces technologies that maximise the emotional experience of fashion products through sensors and wearables (Tillotson, 2008; Wakita et al., 2005).

3.1.2. D&P: process and technology implementation

This sub-category discusses the way in which technology advances simplify and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the decision-making processes within the fashion industry (Yu et al., 2011). The aim is to enhance operational efficiency, improve products' life cycle (Lee, 2017), ensure high level performance, reduce lead time and minimise the risks through advanced methods such as radio-frequency identification, warehouse management, inventory control and real-time replenishment (Bertolini, Rizzi, Romagnoli, & Volpi, 2017; Bindi et al., 2018; Buckel & Thiesse, 2014; Chen, Luo, & Zhu, 2010; Hauser, Günther, Flath, & Thiesse, 2019; Leitz, Solti, Weinhard, & Mendling, 2018; Pedrielli et al., 2016; Shen, Ding, Wang, & Ren, 2019). It also investigates the development of forecasting models and systems dedicated, which predict the time series sales data of fashion items (Choi, Hui, & Yu, 2011) or find the best pricing for sales (Bruzzone, Longo, Nicoletti, Chiurco, & Bartolucci, 2013; Yu-Chung, 2010).

In addition, the development of digital manufacturing technologies, such as printing methods (Sun & Zhao, 2017) or knitting method technologies (Taylor & Townsend, 2014), which could be adopted to simplify and increment companies' efficiency, is described. Another stream relates to operations, discussing topics, such as resource planning (ERP) development (Siswanto & Maulida, 2016), service quality model advancement (Chan, Choi, & Man, 2016; Choi, Chow, Shen, & Wan, 2017) and the implementation of innovative robotic technologies to reach higher levels of flexibility (Xu & Lai, 2011).

Within the sub-category, particular attention is given to the improvement and analysis of supply-chain models and strategies tackling issues such as market fluctuation (Zhou & Shu, 2010), agility (Verma, Jain, & Majumdar, 2013), production planning and control (Fani, Bandinelli, & Rinaldi, 2017), or new product development (NPD) models (Takamitsu & Gobbo Junior, 2019). Performance evaluation within the fashion supply chain to increase the level of competitiveness of the company is also considered (D'Avolio, Bandinelli, & Rinaldi, 2017). Technology and data advances enable the implementation of supply chain systems. For example, the availability of large quantities of data – even of ‘big’ ones – allows the fashion industry to better map its supply chains, and, eventually, to ensure more sustainable ones. This sub-category also includes a series of studies aimed at developing more efficient business models, taking into account specific case studies in the field.

Additionally, it reviewed updated methods of managing human capital, including the development of E- HRM systems (Ma, 2010), the possible contribution of technology for HR practices, such as well-being, social volunteering initiatives and female entrepreneurial activities (Trequattrini, Manfredi, Lardo, & Cuzzo, 2019). It addressed the possibilities brought by the integration of technology and human knowledge (Fan & Qiao, 2010) and its impact on the digital skills, and competencies required by fashion companies. For example, skills to utilise communication technologies (Kalbaska & Cantoni, 2019), skills needed for effective decision- making, such as the ability to source and select appropriate materials, or the ways in which technology can be of use to develop competences and support less experienced designers (Oliveira & Cunha, 2019).

3.2. Category culture and society – C&S

This category included the fields where digital fashion interacts with and contributes to the development of (i) cultures; (ii) education; and (iii) society.

3.2.1. C&S: culture

The sub-category is composed of a number of subjects that according to the literature review dealt with themes such as fashion culture and heritage, history, customs and tradition, religion, art and performances in the digital era.

It showed how fashion digital transformation is related to religion and customs and traditions; some examples are related to the importance to consider the contribution of digitalisation on the spread of local trends connected to religion, such as modest fashion, to a more globalised fashion environment or it directly refers to the use of religious customs and their impact within the fashion field, for example by utilising digital printed Muslim motifs (Andriana, 2019; Indarti & Peng, 2017). Furthermore, it considered and provided different perspectives proposed on the new ways of preserving fashion as a form of art and heritage for communities (Luchev, Paneva-Marinova, Pavlova-Draganova, & Pavlov, 2013), including the digitalisation of archives for cataloguing collections not only for marketing exploitation but also for cultural dissemination (Martin & Ko, 2011; Takahashi, 2013).

Archives are crucial to protect past designs for the use of designers and the preservation of heritage (Ram, 2015; Takahashi, 2015). This category included papers that discuss the use of innovative and interactive technologies, which improve consumers' experiences and enjoyment at museums and installations (Marfia, Tolic, Mascio, Matteucci, & Roccetti, 2015; Martin & Mauriello, 2013). It also encompassed research that offers overviews of country-specific or geographic-specific areas such as the African continent and their relation to fashion or the Japanese fashion, dress and behaviour (Aziz, Salloum, & Alexandre-Leclair, 2019; Takahashi, 2011). A smaller stream discusses the ethical aspects of digital innovation, such as the issue of data ownership of wearable technologies (Baker, 2017), ethical issues regarding counterfeiting (Pastore & Cesareo, 2015) and the impact of fast-fashion consumption on the surrounding environment, to create a stronger sense of awareness when it comes to sustainable issues among the different fashion stakeholders (Collins, 2019; Perrottet & Nicoletti, 2018; Schor, 2013).

3.2.2. C&S: education

The current sub-category consists of those studies whose goal was to share, examine and further enhance teaching and research strategies to contribute to the development of the field also through an academic and educational perspective. It considered the development of skills and competences within educational institutions derived from all the other sub-categorisations; for instance, the improvement of e-design, communication and marketing and technical skills for the production, the placement and development of fashion products and of the field (Avella, 2018; Lenoir, 2019; Pepler & Glosson, 2013). Specifically, it discussed the improvement of technologies and methods, such as neuroeducation, which support students' learning process through new methods and strategies such as computer-aided instruction and 3D printing (Cheng, Liu, & Lin, 2015; Choi, 2012; Coelho Lima Júnior & Zuanon, 2019; Kwon, Lee, & Kim, 2017; Wiana, 2018) and it also discussed challenges faced by educators while engaging fashion students in sustainability development and introducing new pedagogical marketing and communication strategies and perspectives (Joyner, Connell, Lang, Ruppert-Stroescu, & LeHew, 2016; Lenoir, 2019).

3.3.3. C&S: society

The last sub-category makes reference to research and studies that presented and took into consideration how the whole digital fashion system can interact with our society. Although this category is smaller than the others, it has been evaluated as a standalone one since it proposes studies that consider the effects of digital fashion on society. Examples are related to the use of fashion Internet of Things and its effects on society or the impact of wearables, their integration in consumers' everyday life and their connection with societal issues such as safety and surveillance (Ebling, 2016; Harris, 2008; Lamontagne, 2014). In this sub-category, the collaboration of fashion stakeholders with external ones was discussed and it contributed to the creation of interdisciplinary studies and to societal development through fashion.

4. Conclusion and limitations

From this study it was identified that there is a substantial pool of research covering the topics related to the Design and Production and Culture and Society. Even though research on Communication and Marketing is the most prolific one, research in the fashion domain is expanding to other topics. For instance, the category Design and Production – D&P demonstrates the increased interest of the research field on how manual processes are replaced by digital ones: manual processes of extracting colour palettes have been substituted by automatic ones (Lai & Westland, 2020), or the role and perception of designers and managers regarding sustainable issues, life-cycle, and the effects of digitalisation for pollution (DeLong, Casto, Min, & Lee, 2016).

The category Culture and Society – C&S shows instead the impact of fashion on society due to its strong cultural presence (Choi & Lewis, 2018) and it presents topics such as the role of educators in teaching new strategies to designers, to contribute to solve, for instance, sustainable issues (DeLong et al., 2016), to develop the fashion field and to increase its impact on the surrounding environment.

Technology advances are impacting the fashion industry as a whole. This emerges from the studies which cover a great number of topics and highlight the changes that are occurring in the fashion industry. The fashion industry is benefiting from such advances in multiple ways.

From the current literature review the following definition of digital fashion is suggested: Digital fashion involves all those processes that include (i) marketing and communicating tangible and intangible products; (ii) the development and implementation of processes that support the advancement of the industry; (iii) the effects of digital advances on society.

From this study, it emerges that the field of digital fashion could benefit from further research. As shown by Figure 2, the interest in digital fashion is growing.

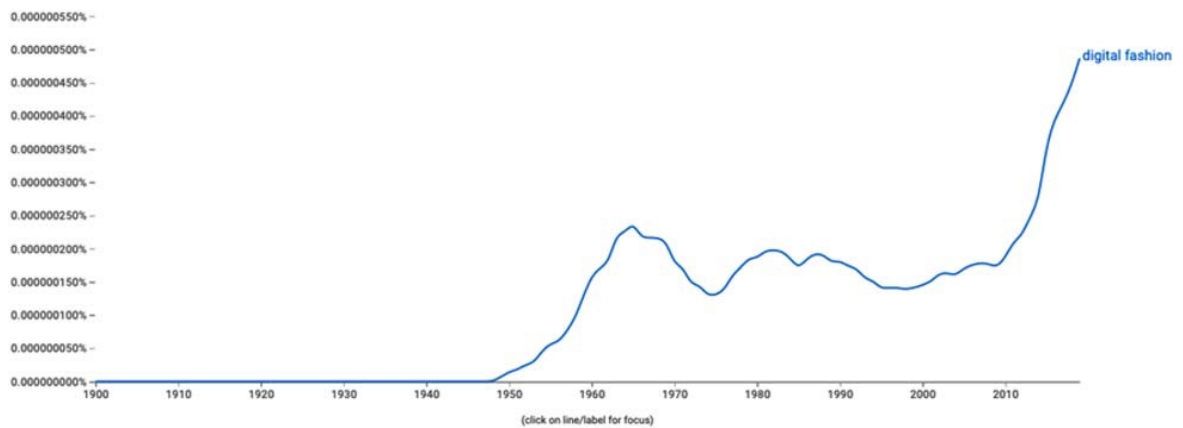


Figure 2. Ngram Viewer: digital fashion (1900–2019).

Additionally, the recent pandemic has accelerated the digitisation process of fashion. However, it also represents a challenge, as it involves many changes for the industry which needs to adapt to the new technologies and also their impacts on society. This research has some limitations. In particular, it considered only those studies that were conducted and published before July 2019. The pandemic of Covid19 could have accelerated the process of digital transformation of companies and increased the interest in developing new research studies and studies within the field. New research topics within the sub-categories could then have emerged since the collection of the data on which this study is based. Future research could advance the field by analysing more in-depth effects of emerging technologies on society, for example the effects of artificial intelligence, 3D printing technologies, phygitalisation and haptic technologies.

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7. Fashion and (Popular) Culture⁶



Fig. 9: PhD Thesis Design - Fashion and (Popular) Culture

In the first section of Part 1, fashion will be introduced, with its complexity, richness, and ill-defined borders. Its close relationship with human cultures will be then presented, stressing its role as a major component of popular culture. In the following section, some specific areas will be explored, namely popular tales, magazines, photography, cinema, television, music, and sport, showing their connections with fashion. In the last section, the emerging role of fashion within the museum world is explored, both when it comes to general museums hosting fashion exhibitions, as well as when it comes to museums fully dedicated to fashion. Digital collections and exhibitions will be then presented before moving to the next Part, where digital fashion communication will move to the forefront.

1.1 *Fashion, a First Approach*

⁶ This chapter is taken from the book *Digital Fashion Communication. An (Inter)cultural Perspective* published by Brill Research Perspectives in Popular Culture, Series: Brill Research Perspectives in Humanities and Social Sciences a peer-reviewed series. The book was submitted on 29 August 2021, double-blind reviewed and accepted on 28 February 2022, and published on 1 September 2022.

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First of all, and before approaching the main relationships between fashion and (popular) culture, let's ask ourselves *what is fashion?*

1.1.1 Fashion, a Fascinating History

The English word “fashion”, which has become so successful and international, comes from the French term “façon”, which means the way of doing something. It is rooted, in turn, in the Latin language, linked with the verb “facere”: to do/ make. In the French language, fashion is said “mode”: with a meaning very similar to “façon”, emphasizing a prescriptive point of view: the right way to do something. It originates from Latin as well: from “modus” meaning the right way or quantity, from which the famous proverb: “Est modus in rebus”, “There is a proper measure in things”. A model is thus a prototype, pattern, exemplar of something. For instance, of human beauty, like in fashion models ... “A la mode de Paris” means “The way Parisians do it”: it suggests that their style and taste should be a model for others to follow (Kurkdjian, 2021). Such normativity can be found, for instance in “Italians do it better”, a phrase popularized by the T-shirt worn by Madonna in her video of “Papa Don’t Preach” 1986 song (Madonna, 2011). As we shall see later on, the connection between pop music and fashion, which has made Madonna one of the most popular fashion icons in recent decades, has to be further explored.

Such fashion/mode might encompass several fields. If we start with clothing and apparel, its top-of-mind reference meaning, we might go closer to the human body, to include body shape and cosmetics, or farer from it, to include home décor and car interior, up to lifestyles and manners (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Different layers of fashion From authors

Such linguistic origins help to understand why the definition of fashion is so fluid and there is no consensus among scholars and practitioners on it. Skov & Melchior (2010) consider fashion as a word providing two different meanings – clothing, and something that is popular, trendy and usually fugacious. Following the studies of Craik (1993), Lennon et al. (2014) depict fashion as “the way we wear our clothes, adorn our bodies, and train our bodies to move to highlight the relationships between bodies and their sociocultural context” (p. 170).

Simmenauer (n.d.) defines fashion according to three different meanings. Fashion (i) in relation with the concept of “working in fashion” within the textile industry; (ii) as a specific and particular clothing style during a time or period; and (iii) with reference to a prevailing lifestyle during a particular time, as for example when one says that “Chihuahua are out of fashion”. The third definition is an enlargement of the second one, considering not only clothes but any kind of element belonging to the above-sketched layers.

While clothing has accompanied human beings from their very origins, the story of “fashion” we are going to explore here is particularly linked to the twentieth century. In fact, the term “fashion” has been quite stable in its presence in the English language, however, as presented in Fig. 2, the relative frequency within English books of the following associated terms: “fashion icon”, “fashion magazine”, “fashion model”, “fashion trend” has seen a major and constant growth since the second half of last century.

1.1.2 “We Wear Culture”

Whichever definition of fashion one might prefer, it is clear that such phenomenon is closely related with human life and (popular) culture, as it is suggested by the very title *We Wear Culture* of a section of *Google Arts & Culture*, one of the most important online initiatives to document fashion history (*Google Arts & Culture*, n.d.).

But what is culture? We might approach again this issue from a linguistic point of view. The word comes from the ancient Latin verb “colo”, which meant “to care” or “to look after”. In Latin, such verb could be applied to three main areas. The first one deals with the way a community looks after its physical environment – “agriculture”: from “colo” and “agros” (fields). The second level has to do with the way human beings cultivate themselves and the new generations: it is the most common meaning of “culture”, which refers to education, literature, art, architecture, music, theatre, and so on – hence locutions like, e.g., “a highly cultivated person”. The third level has to do with the way we articulate our relationship with God: “cult”.

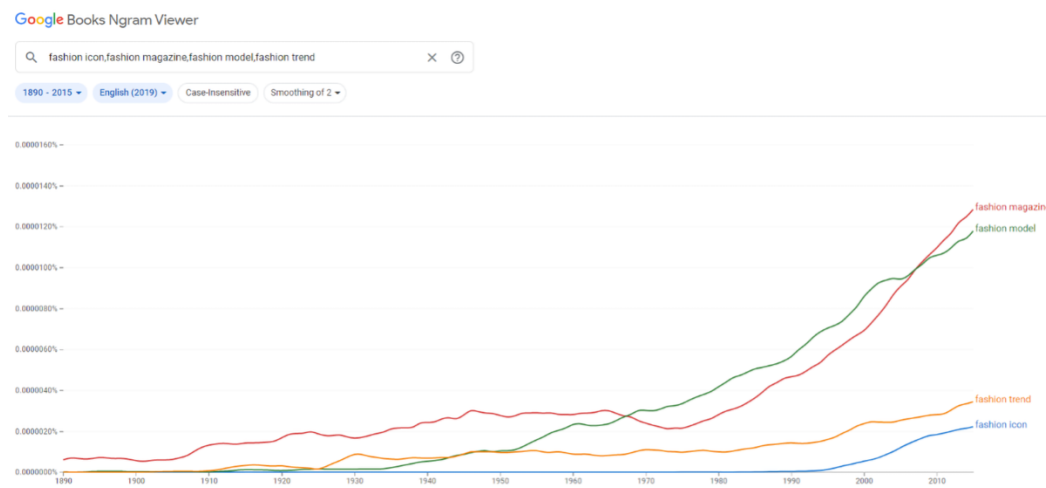


Figure 2 Relative frequency within English books of the following associated terms: “fashion icon”, “fashion magazine”, “fashion model”, “fashion trend”, in the period 1890–2019

From books.google.com/ngram, downloaded JULY 29TH, 2022

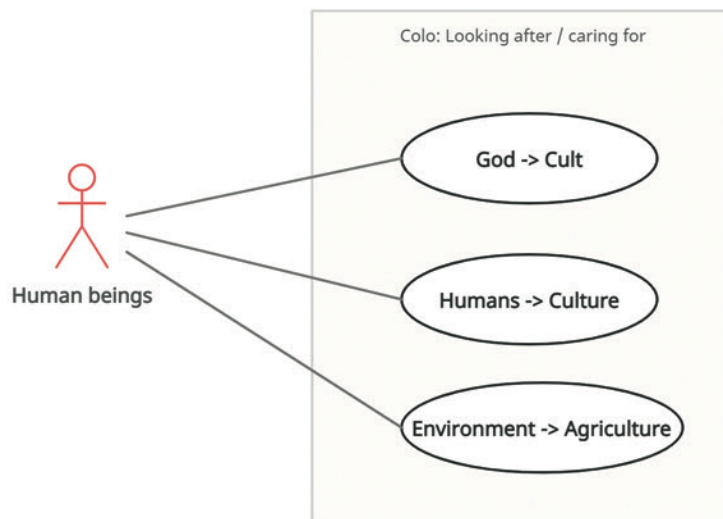


Figure 3 Three layers of culture

Adapted from De Ascaniis & Cantoni (2022: 4)

Fashion, if seen through such cultural lenses, encompasses all three levels (Kalbaska et al., 2018b): clothes and other items are produced from natural or artificial materials (*agriculture*), they are shaped according to social practices (*culture*), and are particularly elaborated when it comes to major life events and sacred rituals (e.g., weddings, funerals, religious ceremonies, etc.: *cult*). Culture and cult do refer also to all manners and ways of life at large, providing a framework according to which practices, including those referring to clothing, are considered appropriate or not. Figure 3 provides a schematic view of this.

Two additional words can help us better understanding the close relationships between culture and fashion – “habit” and “investiture”. The first one, which comes from the Latin verb “habeo” (“to have”), means a stable property, something we are used to: be it a virtue: “habit” or “abitude”, or a cloth: “habit” again, in Italian: “abito”, or a living place: in Italian: “abitazione” (“home”). The second one, “investiture”, comes from Latin (and English) “vest”, and indicates the act through which someone receives the formal clothes

linked to a specific social function. Similarly, candidates are named after the Latin practice according to which people nominated for political elections were dressing in white (“candidus”). This dimension stresses the close relationship between the way we dress and specific social roles, which might be explicitly defined within codes of uniforms (e.g., in the military, healthcare or ecclesiastical domains), or less explicitly by common social practices and etiquettes (Gaulme & Gaulme, 2012; Paternoster & Saltamacchia, 2018).

Beside expressing social status or role, fashion is also used by people to express social meanings about sexuality, gender and identity: the sense of belonging to what is perceived as masculine or feminine is another way to give further significance to what humans decide to wear (Gaulme & Gaulme, 2012; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015).

Fashion, according to Hancock et al. (2013) can be considered as a phenomenon that represents diversity across cultures and depends on time and place variables, a phenomenon that plays a major role when it comes to construct material identity and to shape personal and social spaces.

All of us were born unclad and dress (somehow) up for three main reasons – protection, modesty, and adornment/expression. Fashion, in fact, impacts people’s everyday life and lifestyle not only absolving functional necessities and the need to protect intimacy, it helps individuals to communicate who they are and who they would like to be. Human beings cover themselves to integrate and be part of a determined group and to be accepted by the society or by a specific (sub)culture (Hancock et al., 2013; Kalbaska et al., 2018b). Moreover: we cover ourselves in order to unveil that we are much more than our body; the materiality of clothes displays the immaterial/spiritual side of us.

1.1.3 A Franciscan Story on Clothed and Naked Body

In fact, also a naked body is seen and interpreted in reference to a (missing) cloth, as suggested by Lars Svendsen in his *Fashion: A Philosophy* (2006). An image can help understanding this, within the complex fabric of cultural layers: it is a medieval fresco by Giotto di Bondone (1267–1337) (or his atelier), depicting the moment in which St. Francis

(1181/2–1226) renounces all worldly goods and gives back even his clothes to his father in order to start a life in full poverty (Fig. 4).

According to the *Legenda maior*, when the young Francis from Assisi decided to convert himself and follow Christ in poverty, he found a strong opposition from his father, a rich silk merchant, who might have named his son Francis in order to underline his relationships with the French textile production.

In order to be freed, Francis meets his father in public and gives him back all his clothes. Hereafter the story as recalled by his biographer Bonaventure:

The true lover of poverty showed himself eager to comply and went before the bishop without delaying or hesitating. He did not wait for any words nor did he speak any, but immediately took off his clothes and gave them back to his father. Then it was discovered that the man of God



Figure 4

Giotto di Bondone, *Renunciation of Worldly Goods*, fresco (1295), 230 × 270 cm, Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi (Italy) Source: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giotto_di_Bondone_-_Legend_of_St_Francis_-_5._Renunciation_of_Wordly_Goods_-_WGA09123.jpg

had a hair shirt next to his skin under his fine clothes. Moreover, drunk with remarkable fervor, he even took off his trousers, and was completely stripped naked before everyone. He said to his father: ‘Until now I have called you father here on earth, but now I can say without reservation, *Our Father who art in heaven* since I have placed all my treasure and all my hope in him’. The bishop, recognizing and admiring such intense fervor in the man of God, immediately stood up and in tears drew him into his arms, covering him with the mantle that he was wearing. Like the pious and good man that he was, he bade his servants give him something to cover his body. They brought him a poor, cheap cloak of a farmer who worked for the bishop, which he accepted gratefully and, with his own hand, marked a cross on it with a piece of chalk, thus designating it as the covering of a crucified and half-naked poor man.

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior*, cap. 21⁷

In this short excerpt, and in its artistic representation by Giotto, several elements do appear: the link between cloth(ing) practices, social relations and *status*, the fact that clothes might (un)veil one’s deep beliefs and ethos, how getting dressed, undressed, and re-dressed might signify way more than just wrapping an own body in different fabrics.

Getting fully naked for Francis, a man who was for sure expert in the textile and clothing industry, stresses even further his decision to change his life, and to socially and publicly denounce the current “state of fashion” in which he had lived till that moment.

Medieval frescoes in a church were designed to communicate directly to all population, with no distinction of social status; they were definitely part of popular culture. We will see a similar criticism, even if conducted from a very different viewpoint, later on, while analyzing the final scene of Altman’s movie *Prêt-à-Porter* (*Ready to wear*).

⁷ English translation from: franciscantradition.org/francis-of-assisi-early-documents/the-four-der/the-legends-and-sermons-about-saint-francis-by-bonaventure-of-bagnoregio/the-major-legend-of-saint-francis/the-life-of-blessed-francis/1627-fa-ed-2-page-538

1.1.4 Towards Popular Culture

When it comes to the connection with a specific area of cultural studies – popular culture – fashion, from one side, plays an active role in contributing to model the outside world, shaping and integrating itself in fields such as art, culture, music, cinema, sport, media, tourism and business, creating a symbiosis with the definition of pop culture itself. On the other side, it is thanks to the features of adaptability and creativity that pop culture settled the ideal place for such a symbiosis with the fashion world: what is popular, in fact, influences all aspects of the existence, including what people wear.

Elements of pop culture such as films, television, music etc., act as important players in moving fashion to become more “populist, popular and public” (Danesi, 2019). The merging of culture, business and technology settled a fertile ground to the development of popular trends, laying the foundation for a more pop fashion.

In the following sections, we will go along two different paths. The first one moves from relevant elements of popular culture, outlining the presence and role of fashion there. Namely tales, magazines, photography, cinema, television, music, sport, and a few other interplays will be approached.

The second path will focus on fashion exhibitions and on dedicated fashion museums: the great interest and large publics they are able to attract nowadays, bear a clear testimony to the role of fashion within (popular) culture.

1.2 Popular Culture and Fashion

Let us now explore the first path, meeting tales, magazines, photography, cinema, television, music, sport and a few other fields. All of them have in common that they nurture (fashion) imaginaries, and provide a domain within which personal and social goals are presented and negotiated. In particular, we will find there (aspirational) models, benchmark of success, (proto)types for self-identification. The above-presented layers of “habit” – ranging from the body itself up to lifestyles – are on the stage, from moral ideals

and negative examples in tales, to beauty models, idealized characters and typified stories in photography, cinema, TV and sport. Even if not visible in itself, music provides the soundscape where bodies, clothes and other fashion-related items do move and get alive. It's not by chance that in the prototypical fairy tale of Cinderella clothes and shoes are first of all enacted in a dancing context, where humans can find harmony within themselves, with others, and with their environment.

While presenting each domain, starting from photography, we will briefly address its current digital transformation, so to explore it at two main levels: production/editing and distribution/fruition.

1.2.1 Tales

Fairytales within the context of pop-culture are among the areas that can be more easily connected to fashion (Cantoni, *forth.*). A fairy tale that should be mentioned due to its strong relation with clothing and the dress sense is Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* (Andersen, 1998). The tale tells the story of two cunning tailors, who were able to take advantage of the emperor's narcissism, by convincing him that they were able to sew a suit that could be seen only by smart and intelligent people. The emperor's narcissism prevents him from understanding that the dressmakers were only simulating their work, and they were not making any special suit. Furthermore, the vanity of owning and showing such a unique piece leads the man to present himself in front of his subjects, who were as well pretending to see the dress in order not to reveal their stupidity to others. The farce continues until, in the end, an innocent child, who had no interest in lying to the emperor exclaims in front of him and the crowd that the emperor had no clothes! The tale illustrates, on one side, the power that clothes have in society, and, on the other, the paradox of fashion and the related communicative dimension, which creates a tension between who people really are and who they might pretend to be.

Another tale to mention in order to present the relationship between fashion and pop culture is *Cinderella*, which was written – among others – by Grimm brothers (Grimm et

al., 1978). Cinderella is a little girl who was happily living with her family, until her mother dies. The father remarries another lady, who had two daughters; due to her father's constant absences, the three women turned Cinderella into their servant because they were jealous of her inner and outer beauty.

Meanwhile, the king of the reign where the girl was living organized a three days ball to help his son to find a suitable bride, and to do so, he invited to the event every eligible girl, so that his son would have been able to find his twin soul. Cinderella's stepsisters decided to go to the event, Cinderella instead couldn't go, also because she had no suitable dress to go to the ball. However, when she went to her mother's grave, a bird appeared offering her, for each day of the ball, a different beautiful dress. The first and the second day Cinderella headed off to the ball and the prince had eyes only for her. At the end of the evenings, she managed to return home never letting the prince and the guests know her actual identity.

On the third evening, Cinderella with an even more beautiful dress, once again danced with the prince, who later asked her to bring her home, but in order not to be recognized Cinderella flew down the stairs losing one of her golden slippers that remained in prince's hands. The man declared that he would have only married the girl, whose shoe belonged to, and started a house-to-house search. Cinderella's stepsisters had the chance to try on the shoe with no results, the prince then asked Cinderella's father, if he had another daughter, but he replied that there was only Cinderella, who would have never been able to marry a prince. But the prince insisted Cinderella be given the opportunity to try the shoe, which, in fact, perfectly fitted her foot, and she and the prince became betrothed.

In this case, Cinderella can be considered as an inside beauty in search of the right outside representation. In fact, at home she was sleeping in the ashes and she got used to do very poor activities and it was only during the ball, thanks to the beautiful dresses donated by the bird, that she could express herself in all her beauty. The tale has also to do with modesty and function: Cinderella due to her condition was dressing herself in a functional and modest way. Pieces of clothing in the tale play very important roles: shoes for

example, which have been represented in different ways according to the tale's versions, crystal shoes for Disney and golden slippers for Grimm brothers, are the keystone that allow the prince to find his beloved.

Cinderella's fairy tale has inspired dozens of movies as well as many celebrities' looks. Back at the 2010 Met Gala, Zac Posen dressed the supermodel Doutzen Kroes in a regal, tulle confection dress with delicate sleeves; in 2017 the Bollywood star Aishwarya Rai Bachchan went princess-inspired at Cannes, by wearing a full-skirted Michael Cinco ball gown; in 2019 Zendaya took Cinderella's tale to the next level by bringing along her fairy Godmother (her stylist Law Roach) and by wearing her fairytale inspired-gown at the Met Gala (Segal, 2019).

The topic of how fashion has been inspired by fairy tales has been also deeply treated by authors such as Do Rozario (2018) and Hill (2016).

1.2.2 Magazines

Fashion magazines were born in France, as many other satellites of the fashion cosmos. The history goes back to the late 1600s when the first literary gazette founded by Jean Donneau de Vizé, the *Mercure Galant* (renamed *Mercure de France* in 1714), started to produce illustrations aimed to represent the latest French fashion trends, to provide readers information about court life, gossip, and to provide a form of entertainment by offering theatrical reviews, fashion reports and literary features such songs, poems, stories and anecdotes. The gazette played an important role in the establishment of Paris as fashion capital and in the development of an establishment able to promote new trends by showing people which accessories and clothes to wear and which not (Kalbaska et al., 2018b).

The period of the French Revolution (late 1700) marked a watershed between the costumes worn by the courts, which until that moment had represented the models to follow, and a certain popularization of fashion, which no longer was perceived as connected to the court's lifestyle. Also due to the diffusion of the bourgeoisie class and to the invention of

fashion magazines, the late eighteenth century was characterized by a growth of the French fashion industry.

Through the founding of the *Courier de la mode* (1768–69), followed by the *Galerie des modes et costumes francais* (1778–87), fashion information started to be regularly disseminated to a wider French audience mainly composed by noble and bourgeois readers (Van Cleave, 2020).

Another fashion magazine, *Cabinet des Modes ou les Modes nouvelles*, made its appearance on November 15th, 1785, with the aim to inform French and European readers on Paris novelties in terms of clothing and furniture. In 1786, the magazine changed its name into *Magasin des modes nouvelles françaises et anglaises* and started an international collaboration with a similar English periodical providing its readers information and novelties about British and French fashion trends. From February 25, 1790 the magazine changed its name again into *Journal de la Mode et du Goût*, until it was closed between 1792–1793 (Oppici, 2017).

Although some fashion forerunners were registered among fashion magazines, it was not until the twentieth century that they became spread within the society and part of the pop culture imaginary. After 1945, two French magazines became well-known from a commercial point of view: *Elle* and *Marie Claire*, both were interested in representing a modern ideal of woman and played an important role when *prêt-à-porter* appeared in Europe. The increase of attention toward fashion magazines happened in the United States with the appearance of two iconic magazines: *Harper's Bazaar* (1867) and *Vogue* (1892)

and it was concurrent with the US economic boom period. In 1913, the company Hearst acquired *Harper's Bazaar*, becoming *Vogue's* main competitor throughout the twentieth century. Later in 1909, *Vogue* was bought by Condé Nast, which in 1913 created *Vanity Fair*. Editors of fashion magazines played and still play a fundamental role: characters such as Caramel Snow, Diana Vreeland and Anna Wintour more recently, contributed to

the success of their magazines and to their positioning as arbiters in the fashion field. That required creativity and experimenting new approaches to fashion communication.

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According to Kalbaska et al. (2018b), fashion magazines have four different functions: (i) inform their readers; (ii) create a sense of product legitimization; (iii) promote different ways to wear products; and (iv) offer a place to advertise products. While all those dimensions still remain in a digitally transformed context, fashion magazines are facing new challenges and exploring new paths. In particular, their role as the main, if not only, gatekeepers of fashion could not be maintained.

If from one side the digitalization process has boosted and popularized the spread of information through the birth of online magazines, which nowadays offer immediate access to information on fashion products (up to eventually buying them online), on the other side, the emergence of social media, such as blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter, has created the perfect environment for people to generate their own contents and actively take part in the co-creation of fashion industry's image and reputation.

Due to this situation, many practices that were well established among mass media had to be adapted and transformed (Rocamora, 2017): fashion stakeholders have readapted themselves by establishing their presence on social media platforms, in order to start to create contents with the aim to engage with people through digital Word of mouth (eWoM) and real time conversations.

The digital communication market has allowed many other players to enter this ecosystem, lowering the entrance threshold: think, for instance, of digital influencers. Fashion brands themselves have nowadays become (also) media companies, constantly producing and distributing contents to their audiences, so that fashion magazines in many cases have to partner with them to keep their relevance. Fashion magazines in order to survive had to change their focus and to amplify their perspective. In particular, (i) editors have become

celebrities; (ii) magazines have entered the fashion industry and the digital businesses by launching their own companies such as *Elle* Womenswear in 2006 or Hearst Digital in 2014; (iii) collaborations with other fields such as the world of art and museums have been boosted to create legitimacy among readers. An example is Vogue's collaboration with the MET – Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2014 (Kalbaska et al., 2018b). Moreover, online platforms have become a fertile ground for the spread of fashion news on the internet, through the birth of news agencies such as BoF, Highsnobiety, Pambianco, Vogue Business and WWD where news about trends and pop culture are shared by experts and journalists.

Digital communication is requiring a dramatic acceleration of content production: as it has been the case of collections and runways, also magazines cannot keep their usual – established and comfortable – pace: they need to become hybrid companies, constantly issuing contents and digitally filling-in the gap between their paper editions and the digital ecosystem, sometimes even discontinuing their presence on glossy paper.

Moreover, digital communication platforms have made the border between information and promotion even thinner (Hanusch, 2019): an article about a collection could be, at the same time, the place where clothes can be directly bought and reviewed by ordinary users. New authorities are emerging and power systems are being negotiated in a battlefield where fashion magazines strive to keep their power and highly respected position (Mora, 2021; *potestas* and *auctoritas*, as suggested by Sadaba & Torregrosa, 2021).

However, in such a context, there are also opposite movements, for instance information platforms launching some paper publications, as a way to stress their importance and to call for a deeper differentiation, especially from influencers, bloggers and fashion companies. In this respect, think for instance of the case of *Business of Fashion*, which in recent years has launched also a printed magazine.

1.2.3 Photography

Although fashion photographs could be traced back to the 1850s, in the court of Napoleon III, photography as an advertising instrument started to be utilized only in the early 20th century, when fashion through the spread of magazines became more accessible to the audience. Prior to the advent of social media, in fact, fashion magazines were the main if not only available medium to disseminate collections and trends (*Beginnings of Fashion Photography*, n.d.).

In 1909, the publisher Condé Nast acquired the American magazine *Vogue*, which was then transformed into a fashion publication magazine: its aim was to capture the spirit and the trends of New York, London and Paris through innovative photography and a growing supply of glamorous models by also featuring more photography along with fashion illustrations and contributing to make photography an integral part of fashion magazines (*An interview with Jonathan Newhouse, Chairman of the Board of Directors*, n.d.).

The rise of *Vogue* and Condé Nast happened also thanks to the photographer Edward Steichen, considered the father of modern fashion photography, who spent the first years of the 20th century in Paris as an art photographer and painter. In 1911 he was assigned by the French magazine *Art et Décoration* to take pictures of dresses realised by the Parisian designer Paul Poiret. In 1923 when Steichen was already an established painter and photographer, at the age of 44, he was hired by Condé Nast publishing house, which offered him a job as director of photography for *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* (Capper, 2017; Meda, 2011; Zachary, 2015).

Then it was the turn of the French photographer Helmut Newton who in 1957 landed a contract with *British Vogue* and from then on worked with magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Playboy*, and of the American photographer Irving Penn, who is considered one of the 20th century's most influential photographers despite having gained his *Vogue* first and only cover in 1943 (*Biography of Helmut Newton*, n.d.; *Irving Penn Archives*, n.d.).

The American photographer Annie Leibovitz rose to fame in the 1970s and is considered among the most innovative aesthetic photographers. She became chief photographer for *Rolling Stone* in 1973, later on she joined *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. She is known for shooting celebrities as well as for her magical and fantastic fashion images, like the one with Keira Knightley shot for *Vogue*. Her most iconic portraits and images include many British Royal Family portraits, Obama's family, and John Lennon image portrayed naked next to Yoko Ono, realised just five hours before he was killed (*Annie Leibovitz*, n.d.; *Annie Leibovitz's Intimate Portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and the Royal Family*, 2016; *Annie Leibovitz. American photographer*, n.d.).

The American Bruce Weber started his fashion career in the late 1970s becoming popular for his portfolios in *GQ*, *Elle*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, for appearing in the *Soho Weekly News* and for his campaigns for Abercrombie & Fitch, Calvin Klein, Pirelli, Ralph Lauren and Versace. Weber's photos have become a permanent possession of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and some of his major pieces have been housed among the most celebrated exhibits in the world such as New York's Whitney Biennale, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, Venice's Palazzo Fortuny, Musée de l'Elysée in Switzerland, and London's National Portrait Gallery. He is also known for being a filmmaker and for having founded his fashion label Weberbilt in 2003 (*Any photographer has to have a big fantasy life*, n.d.; *Bruce Weber photograph and filmmaker*, n.d.).

Towards the end of the 1970s, the German photographer Peter Lindbergh made his appearance in the fashion world. He was among the first ones to include narratives within editorials, in 1988 realized Anna Wintour's first cover of *Vogue* and he is also known for having directed critically acclaimed movies, documentaries and fashion films. Around the 1990s, with his style that resembled documentary photography, he changed the way models were portrayed and contributed to create the supermodels era by photographing Naomi Campbell, Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford, and Linda Evangelista (*Peter Lindbergh*, n.d.).

In the same years, also the photographer Mario Testino rose to fame when in 1997 he photographed Princess Diana for a cover of *Vanity Fair*. Originally from Peru, the photographer is considered among the most influential fashion photographers due to his vibrant style and to the mixture of cultural and commercial elements. He has worked with many iconic brands such as Burberry, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Valentino, as well as for fashion magazines such as *Elle*, *GQ*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* (Mario Testino, n.d.).

The American Steven Meisel, who had pursued an education in illustrations in Parsons New York, has become among the most recognized fashion photographers in the 1990s. He has been the official photographer of the cover of *Italian Vogue* for two decades, as well as of every Prada campaign since 2004, and he contributed to Madonna's book: *Sex* with his shots (Madonna et al., 1992). He has become popular thanks to his many collaborations with brands such as Calvin Klein, Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, Valentino and Versace and due to his choices about fashion editorials, like the one for *Italian Vogue* that represented models in a mental institute (Rumenova, n.d.; *The mastermind of fashion photography: Steven Meisel*, 2018).

Finally, among the most well-known fashion photographers, we can enlist the American David LaChapelle, who was discovered by Andy Warhol, who offered him his first job as a photographer for the *Interview Magazine*. After the experience with Warhol, the photographer moved to fashion magazines, embracing a porno-chic style with bright colors, powerful saturation and a precise setting of models, sceneries and objects, taking inspiration from art history. At the beginning of the 21st century he left fashion to art photography (Day, 2012; Mun-Delsalle, 2014).

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While fashion photography has offered and still offers plenty of contents to glossy paper magazines and posters, it has been deeply disrupted by the digital transformation. As

above mentioned, we shall see such transformation at two main levels: production/editing and distribution/fruition (Pardo, 2015).

Digital photography can be produced and edited by everyone, with very low production and storage costs if compared with its analogical uncle. In particular, its marriage with smartphones has made photography an everyday practice, leaving the idea of consecrating special moments towards a constant documentation of one's life. Moreover, thanks to the availability of front cameras, the "selfie" genre has dramatically emerged. Augmented Reality filters have added the possibility of instant editing, moving photography from the realm of producing faithful copies to the one of expressing desired images.

Thanks to the emergence of image sharing social media platforms – in particular to Instagram and WhatsApp and their equivalent in the Chinese market such as WeChat or Weibo – pictures are often made to be shared with one's relatives, (social media) friends and followers. Since the small screen of a smartphone has become the major fruition place, also professional photography has adapted to its formats and limits.

In general, if we make a reference to the three degrees of conventionality of images identified by Dubois (1983) (Mazzali Lurati & Cantoni 2005), digital photography has distanced itself from the iconic one, further stressing the indexical – the picture testifies that the person was there – and the conventional one, which stresses the role of photography as a conventional, artificial expression of oneself and the world.

Such popularization of photography has been accompanied by emerging critical reflections about stereotyped models of beauty that had emerged within the fashion domain. The recent body positivity movement, for instance, is an answer to unreachable and unhealthy beauty stereotypes, ranging from super-models to size-zero ones. Such deeper awareness of the impact of photography onto what we perceive as beautiful or not, has accompanied and is accompanying the success or failure of fashion companies, e.g., in the underwear field. Think for instance of Victoria's Secrets, which had to discontinue

its annual show based on a quite exclusive ideal of feminine beauty, and of the emergence of other brands, closely related with the body positivity movement.

Let us move now from still images to moving ones.

1.2.4 Cinema

When it comes to the interplay among fashion, pop culture and cinema (Dubreuil, 2016), the women casual style, for example, which included comfortable clothing such as trousers, started to be adopted by the masses in the 1930s also thank to the film making system, where Hollywood stars such as Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Kathrine Hepburn and Jean Harlow appeared for the first-time wearing riding and sailor trousers both in films and in their private lives (Cunningham, 2016).

Another example of the interweaving of the film and fashion industry is connected to the spread of the jeans in the 1950s, although the word “jean” started to be utilized in the 1800s, referring to a twill cotton textile employed for the production of pants. Soon this type of trousers started to be called with the name of the cloth it was commonly used for their production, and only after the 1873 when the owner of a wholesale fabric, Levi Strauss, and a tailor, Jacob Davis, patented the jeans realized from indigo-dyed denim with pockets and sturdy riveting made for the workforce, the trousers started to become a garment, being dictated in a certain sense by a specific social group. But it was only thanks to Marlon Brando and to the movie *The Wild One* (1953) that blue jeans started to be adopted by masses, becoming together with the T-shirt the symbol of rebel teenagers (Bass-Kreuger, 2019; Cunningham, 2016).

During the 1960s Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn), the protagonist of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) became an inspiration for many women. At the time, the romantic cinematic comedy revolutionized the way women looked at fashion by making her look composed by flipped hairs, large sunglasses and sleeveless iconic dresses and it contributed to make Tiffany & Co. universally recognized as the American jewellery house par excellence (Biron, 2019; *Fashion on Film: Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 2020).

Movies such as *Risky Business* (1983), *Pretty Woman* (1990), *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and *The Great Gatsby* (2013), among others, contributed to spread fashion trends globally and to the creation of a sort of fashion pop culture constituted by iconic must-have pieces such as Ray Ban glasses initially worn by US army pilots and brought to the fore by Tom Cruise, the brown polka dots dress and the red gown dress in the spirit of Valentino worn by Julia Roberts, the Chanel blazer and leather pants worn by Anne Hathaway, and the white suits and skimmer hats of Leonardo di Caprio.

Also, the 007 series of movies inspired by the romances of Ian Fleming have played a major role in the spread of fashion menswear style. The first 007 movie was released in 1962 and for all the 1960s, it was Savile Row's tailor Anthony Sinclair, the one who defined the style of the most famous secret agent ever. Later came Dimi Major, Cyril Castle, Douglas Hayward, Brioni and Tom Ford, who dressed the most famous gentleman and action hero, contributing to create his classic, timeless style, which soon became a must-have in a man's wardrobe (Redaelli, 2019; Szmydke, 2016).

Movies haven't inspired only trends adopted by masses, they have also directly inspired fashion houses: Ralph Lauren chose to utilize the film *Downton Abbey* as the sole inspiration for the Fall Ready to Wear collection 2012, while the Givenchy's autumn–winter 2012 collection, realized by the artistic director for the time Riccardo Tisci, unveiled a line with a sci-fi impulse, taking inspiration from the “cyberfilm” *Matrix* (1999), directed by Les Wachowski in 1999. *Blade Runner* (1982), with its dark and neo-futuristic universe, was instead the source of inspiration for the Dior pre-collection autumn–winter 2015 (Marain, 2020). The film industry has not only been utilized to describe the positive side of

fashion: the movie *Prêt-à-Porter* (*Ready to Wear*) by Robert Altman, released in 1994, apart from being considered among the ultimate fashion movies, does not tend to portray the classical sense of expressiveness and aesthetic of fashion, rather its dramas and intrigues. The comedy makes, in fact, fun of the fashion industry and criticizes its system

while representing all its stakeholders: from designers, photographers, magazine editors, journalists, models, up to make-up artists and assistants.

The film director shot part of the movie during SS/1994 in Paris, providing to *Ready to Wear* a layer of campy realness and presenting the hyped entity of Fashion Weeks, involving designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler, Christian Lacroix and Karl Lagerfeld. The latter refused to join the movie and he went to German court to ask the removal of Altman's concerned scene. Furthermore, cameos involved not only designers such as Gianfranco Ferre, Issey Miyake, and Sonia Rykiel, but also models such as Christy Turlington, Helena Christensen, Linda Evangelista, Claudia Schiffer, Carla Bruni, and Naomi Campbell (Defares, 2015).

With its movie, Altman portrayed the 1990's, the glorious years of fashion and haute couture, while showing the difficulties of this world that sometimes still yearns to be taken seriously in mainstream culture. As mentioned above, while interpreting Giotto's fresco of St. Francis getting naked in front of his father, also in this movie a bitter criticism is offered of the state of fashion of the 1990s. In the final scene, the parable of fashion losing every contact with modesty and functionality (as we have also seen in *The Emperor's New Clothes*), ends in a show where all models are just naked ... Still, even if someone becomes aware of it, the reporter just leaves the stage, not being able to denounce the paradox, as it had been done by an innocent child in the tale, and by Francis in his life. On the contrary, the show must go on, and the system covers its failures and futility. Hereafter the script, with the words by the fashion TV reporter, who cannot continue covering the fashion system, gives up, and is immediately replaced by someone who continues the show:

This is Kitty Potter live from Paris at Simone Lo's défilé. Well, what can I say? Simone Lo has shown us everything. I mean, I don't know how much of this is going to be on TV or anything but ... It's so new. I mean, it's ... It's so old. I mean, it's ... I mean, she shows it like it really is. It's so old, it's true. It's so true, it's new. It's the oldest new look, it's the

newest old look. Simone Lo has created a new, new look for every man, woman and child. And they can all afford it. It's called the bare look. So, hooray for Simone Lo!

What the hell am I talking about? I mean, for Christ's sakes, what is going on here, really? Can you tell me what's going on on this planet? This is fucking fruitcake time. I mean ... Is that fashion? Is it? I mean, is there a message out there? I mean, you got a lot of naked people wandering around here. I mean, I've been forever trying to find out what this bullshit is all about, and do you know what? You know what? I have had it. I have had it. Goodbye. Au revoir. Sophie, you got yourself a career.

This is Sophie Choiset for FAD TV. In May, 1968, the great couturier Balenciaga closed his atelier forever because, he said, 'there is no one left to dress.' It appears Simone Lo believes the same. She has just shown us a celebration of fashion in the profoundest sense of the word. She has made a statement here today that will be felt for decades to come. She's made a choice that will influence all designers everywhere. And most of all, she has spoken to women the world over, telling them not about what to wear but how to think about what they want and need from fashion. This is Sophie Choiset in Paris for FAD TV.

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The digital transformation of cinema has deeply impacted its production processes as well as the lifecycle of its same products (Pardo, 2015).

In the first domain, digital production has fully integrated what used to be "special effects" into a new mixed-reality, where reproduction of physical objects, their digital editing and the insertion/animation of digital ones are placed on a continuum, very often impossible to discern. Characters, with their skins, clothes and other accessories are then (also) produced as fully digital items, giving birth to the flourishing of digital costume designs, which have later on found their ways also in video gaming and in NFT – Non-Fungible Tokens (Rennie & Potts, 2020). Additionally, what used to be for decades a domain reserved for very few, has become an activity everyone can do with their own mobile

phone, making the production and sharing of videos a distinctive activity of contemporary life.

On the fruition side, Cinema movies have combined their original model based on theaters with several ways of access, deeply influenced by the emergence of television and of digital platforms, which we will see in the next paragraph. This move has promoted the diffusion of fashion films as a genre in itself. In fact, digital videos have been more and more considered as a valuable tool by fashion marketing and communication departments to create new contents and entertain audiences. According to Buffo (2019), fashion films can be considered as online videos created by fashion brands based on brand contents translated into motion images; they are usually inspired by cinematography, although they have developed their own way to communicate through net-aesthetics, and they contribute to create a stronger brand identity. Three main typologies of narrative choices are usually adopted by fashion brands to develop fashion films and fashion sagas: (i) narrate a story; (ii) create or strengthen brand personality; (iii) evoke atmosphere. In 2016, Alessandro Michele, Gucci's creative director, in order to launch the new Guilty perfume proposed a fashion film, recalling the atmosphere of the movie *Death in Venice* (1971). In 2017, Kenzo creative directors Carol Lim and Humberto Leon in order to present their autumn–winter collection launched *Cabiria, Charity, Chastity* directed by Natascha Lyonne, the film can be considered an ode to Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957) and tells the story of Chastity, who reconciles with her Vaudevillian past and finds the meaning of life in a foolish world. In 2017, also the fast fashion brand H&M in collaboration with Erdem launched the film *Secret Life of Flowers*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, in which the narrative follows a love triangle, and it is set in a mysterious country mansion where it is “always spring”. Within the fashion film category, Miu Miu in 2011 has launched *Women's Tales*, an online film series whose aim is on one side to promote fashion branding, showcasing fashion items through feminine artistic expression and, on the other, to share a feminist message (Resting, 2019; *Top 10 Fashion Films of the Season*, 2017).

1.2.5 Television

Not only cinema, but also television through the time became one of the mediums to

showcase new styles, moving from being the place where characters were costumed to windowing new tendencies in the fashion panorama.

The tv show that could be considered as the pioneer in the promotion of stylish look for masses is the American soap *Dynasty*, which was the first tv show with an *ad-hoc* designer, who was taking care of the fact that each single cloth should match the episode. From one side, the soap was influenced by the trends of the 1980s, on the other, it was impacting on them, dictating new styles (Cunningham, 2016).

At the turn of the century, in the wake of *Dynasty* other TV shows emerged: *Sex and the City*, *Gossip Girl* and more recently *Stranger Things* and *Game of Thrones*. The first two tv series showcased iconic labels such as Armani, Chanel, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Fendi, Jimmy Choo, Manolo Blanik, Prada etc., and through them characterized each TV character and her/his life, becoming an integral part of the storytelling (Cunningham, 2016; Thrasher, 2020). The

Netflix sci-fi horror series *Stranger Things* instead, has recently brought to the surface the Millennials' nostalgia for the 1980s pop-culture history through a setting of the time, musical tributes to the 1980s performers with the use of synthesizers and clothing style (Garcia, 2016). Eleven, the protagonist, has become an icon of style by bringing back to light bubble dresses, rompers, bowling shirts and colorful dungarees. In 2019, for the debut of the third season of the series, Nike released a capsule collection that included three different shoe models, sweatshirts and t-shirts and also Levi's, the fast fashion brands H&M and Paul & Bear launched their capsule collections proposing their idea of *Stranger Things* streetstyle (Abbiadati, 2019; Banfi, 2019; Garcia, 2016; Pantano, 2019; Rearick, 2019). Another TV series that impacted on the fashion industry is *Game of Thrones*, an American fantasy drama series created by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss for HBO. Gucci's autumn–winter 2018 runway show despite showing all the classic style elements of a Gucci collection such as bold prints and vibrant colors, also presented some accessories inspired by *Game of Thrones* including dragoons, snakes and a decapitated head (Stow, 2018). Adidas instead, in 2019 has teamed up with the HBO series to release

six Ultra Boost sneakers inspired by the saga and in the same year the beauty brand Urban Decay has partnered with *Game of Thrones* to create its whimsical palette (*Winter is here; Adidas Running Announces Game of Thrones® Collaboration*, 2019).

Television has allowed the birth of specific channels dedicated to fashion: the most well-known is FashionTV (FTV), an international fashion and life-style broadcasting television channel founded by Michel Adam Lisowski in France in 1997. The channel is a distributed satellite channel, which offers a review of global fashion and is independently owned and operated from its headquarters in Paris, London and Vienna. It offers over 100 hours of monthly programming presenting the latest fashion trends, shows, designer events and it also presents industry professionals; its aim is to inspire audience by offering an insider's view of the fashion industry in a highly desired clip-based content. It can be considered among the few TV equivalent to fashion print media appealing to everyone interested in the fashion world (trends, style, beauty, etc.) (Fashion TV, n.d.).

In 10 years after its foundation, FTV expanded towards the eastern world in China and India and also in other markets such as Australia, Africa and South America (Fashion TV, n.d.).

The Covid19 pandemic has contributed to give a new life to the small screen: television has been chosen as the channel par excellence to present the new spring-summer collections 2020/2021 by two iconic Italian brands, Armani and Elisabetta Franchi. During the Milan Fashion Week, respectively on channel LA5 and La7, the two brands enabled their audiences to take part in their shows directly from the first row and to reposition television as one of the major channels to communicate fashion (Bandirali, 2020).

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As for photography and cinema, the digital transformation has deeply impacted also television. In particular, it's worth to mention here the emergence of new players, in particular of new platforms – like Netflix or Amazon Video – that managed to disrupt the production and distribution market.

Fruition has moved from dedicated (big) screens, where the programs were accessed according to their schedule, to the possibility of getting individual items, independently from a given schedule, frequently on the small screen of a smartphone.

Smartphones have in fact emerged both as a major tool, which allows individuals to produce good quality images and videos, and at the same time, as the most used screen to access visual materials, or to be used as a second screen in combination with a larger one, to comment, share on social media, buy while accessing movies and films. Propagation and negotiation of fashion-related images and trends have found in smartphones and in their affordances a major acceleration device. In fact, such fragmentation and distribution of materials that used to be beforehand accessed in quite large, pre-defined chunks, had already (digitally) transformed Music, which should be tackled now.

1.2.6 Music

Within the context of pop culture, music as well has not been exempt from fashion convergence: starting from the twentieth century, music has become a passion for designers and clothing a fixation for musicians. Young people's desire to emulate their favorite performers allowed fashion to become the *trait d'union* between them and musicians, creating different subcultures. In some cases, music stars dressed up dictating new trends, in others, stylists proposed their own design to them, contributing to widen the fashion panorama.

Elvis Presley with his leather jacket embodied in 1950s the ideal of the so-called "bad boy", which was later taken up and brought to the fore in 1978 by John Travolta in the musical-film *Grease*. The Beatles instead contributed to the birth of a counterculture known as hippies, while in the US young generations started to criticize American values and to challenge them on topics such as political and human rights, drugs, freedom, ecology, etc. Psychedelic art was another form of expression that hippies utilized together with music to express their ideals. Their style was made by bright colors, jeans, vests,

loose fitting clothes, long hair and no shoes or sandals, rejecting consumerism in favor of hand-made production or second-hand garments (Cunningham, 2016).

Between the 1970s and the 1990s it was the turn of Heavy metal and Punk groups. The former movement with music icons such as Alice Cooper, the Kiss and later on Marilyn Manson wearing black clothes, high heels, leather jackets, spandex and make-up. The latter was born in UK as a (sub)culture proposed by the young working class frustrated by the high levels of unemployment, it had stars as The Clash, Damned and The Sex Pistols. Distinctive traits for punkers were the leather boots and jackets with metal rivets, tattoos, piercings and hair eccentrically colored and styled. Sex Pistols, one of the most influential bands, were styled by their Malcom McClaren and his wife Vivienne Westwood, who also owned a shop in King's Road at the time called "Let it Rock", where people could go and purchase the garments worn by their music models (Cunningham, 2016; Reardon, 2020).

The advent of MTV helped to reinforce the union between music and fashion. The history of MTV started in 1981, it was a TV channel where nothing else than rock music was displayed 24/7, reaching an audience mainly aged from 12 to 34 years. Featured musicians influenced the stylists of the time, sometimes also becoming designers of themselves, but also stylists dictated the trends proposing new looks to the stars. Some of the major fashion trends launched by MTV are for example Madonna's lacy gloves, hoop earrings, cropped sweaters and cropped pants. The rock star to create her style has collaborated with many fashion haute couture brands such as D&G, Givenchy, Jean Paul Gautier. She also contributed to the creation of M by Madonna, a fashion line, realized in collaboration with the fast fashion brand H&M. Through the MTV channel another performer launched his music and style: Michael Jackson. His red leather jacket and his glittered style were copied by many fans (Cassidy, 2001; Cunningham, 2016).

Also, Kurt Cobain's unplugged sweater was made famous and copied around the world through MTV. The iconic sweater worn by the rockstar during the MTV Unplugged concert was recently sold for \$334,000, making it the most expensive sweater ever sold during an auction (Kreps, 2019).

In 2011, when Amy Winehouse passed away in her Camden Square apartment, Jean Paul Gaultier celebrated the singer with a spring-summer 2012 collection inspired by her life. Playing on the late star's style, rooted in the 1950s and 1960s, Gaultier sent out on the catwalk models with beehive, thick eyeliner makeup, beauty spot, clothes with tarty fifties flavor, black skirts, brassiere visible under a white top and bustiers (Marain, 2020).

Another performer, Lady Gaga, in 2014 was chosen to be the testimonial for the Versace's spring-summer collection and in July 2020 she was chosen by the fashion maison Valentino as testimonial of the new fragrance "Voce Viva" ("*A perfume is born*", 2020).

Typical trendsetters of the current pop culture, who not only influenced fashion trends, but also established their own fashion business, are: Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake, Jay Z, Kanye West and Rhianna. In 2005, Justin Timberlake founded his denim and lifestyle clothing line William Rast together with Trace Ayala and in 2008 he was engaged as a testimonial by Givenchy to launch the new men fragrance (Chan, 2016; Frangouil, 2018; *Justin Timberlake's William Rast Clothing Line*, 2009; Pacella, 2009). Beyoncé's character is associated with many fashion brands and projects: she has collaborated with and endorsed many popular fashion and cosmetics labels such as Armani, L'Oreal, Tommy Hilfiger etc. In 2004, together with her mother, daughter of a sewer, Beyoncé launched House of Deréon, a ready-to-wear fashion line, whose style was inspired by three generations of women in her family. In 2016 she received the Fashion Icon Award by The Council of Fashion Designers of America and she launched another fashion label, Ivy Park, in collaboration with Topshop. In 2018 Ivy Park became a company fully controlled by the singer and in 2019 she announced a collaboration with Adidas (*Adidas X Ivy Park*, 2019; Duboff, 2016; *Fashion icon Beyoncé*, n.d.; Holmes, 2016; *House of Deréon*, n.d.). Jay Z together with Beyoncé, his wife, is a constant presence in fashion shows and in the main fashion events such as the MET Galas. He has been involved in the fashion industry since 1999, when he founded together with Damon Dash Rocawear an apparel company based in New York. In 2011 he launched Life + Times, a pop culture website where the rapper and businessman shares his interest for high end cars, clothes and lifestyle items and designs (Perpetua, 2011; *Rocawear Apparel LLC*, n.d.).

The hip-hop performer Kanye West is considered among the most influential global trendsetters and urban style fashion leaders: he has collaborated with brands such as Nike, Louis Vuitton, Adidas to create his sneaker collections and he has also launched the womenswear ready-to-wear label Yeezy and alongside his wife, Kim Kardashian, starred in Balmain's spring-summer 2015 campaign (*Kanye West*, n.d.).

Also Rhianna, apart from being constantly present in Fashion Weeks, in 2016 launched the limited collection Fenty x Puma and in 2017 she created her Fenty Beauty brand, with inclusivity and diversity at the forefront of its brand identity. In 2018, she then launched a lingerie fashion collection and in 2019 she has become the first woman of color to lead a house under the LVMH brand by launching Fenty fashion house (Ilchi, 2020; *Rihanna makes history*, 2019; Vingan Klein, 2016).

Music festivals such as Coachella and the Fyre Festival are to be mentioned. The first one is to be considered due to its importance gained through the years not only as a music festival but also as a public event, where stars and fashion icons set new trends both in terms of music as well as in terms of fashion. The annual music festival was founded in 1999 and since then it has been held at the Empire Polo Club in Indio (California) in the Coachella Valley of the Colorado Desert. Every year it hosts on its stage very famous singers and bands such as The White Stripes, Daft Punk, Jay Z, Outcast, Beyoncé etc., together with less known bands and singers coming in particular from Mexico. Coachella's audience has grown through the years and the most recent editions of the festival, before Covid19 spread, attracted 250,000 revelers coming from all over the world across two weekends of April. It is considered an unofficial opening ceremony for a summer run of global music festivals (Paton, 2021).

As stated by the New York Times (Paton, 2021), according to Katy Lubin, vice president for communications at the global fashion search platform Lyst, when it comes to fashion, online searches for "festival fashion" start in March and last until July. Furthermore, according to Lucie Greene (Paton, 2021), founder of Light Years consultancy and trend forecaster, festivals are for some fashion brands a great occasion to create a network with

potential customers, which buy products only for such specific occasions. Some fashion brands dedicate entire collections and products to music festivals. As an example, H&M and ASOS plan months in advance which items to place on their online markets to satisfy these customers' needs.

Through influencers and the use of brand ambassadors, also luxury brands exploit music festivals to advertise their products. In this case such brands tend to put on stage social media campaigns involving stars present during the event.

While Coachella can be considered a highly successful case, we should mention here also a failure case, which demonstrates the importance of digital media in this domain: the case of Fyre Festival. This festival has taken place in 2017 on the Bahamian island Great Exuma. The luxury event was scheduled to take place on April 28–30 and on May 5–7, 2017 with the aim of promoting the company's Fyre app for booking music talent, ideated by Billy McFarland, CEO of Fyre Media Inc., and by the rapper Ja Rule.

In addition to live music, at Fyre Festival was implied the presence of celebrities: many of them promoted the event on their Instagram and social media profiles. Among fashion icons that advertised the festival there were Alessandra Ambrosio, Bella Hadid, Chanel Iman, Emily Ratajkowski, Hailey Baldwin and Kendall Jenner. Later on, some of these stars apologized for their choice of being involved in such a failure (Brockington, 2019). While the festival had

been announced as a dreaming luxury experience, in fact, its organization was an epic failure, combining different crises related to security, food and beverage, accommodation, medical services up to artist relations, causing initially the postponement of the event and then its definitive cancellation. Among the problems that attendees experienced there were prepackaged sandwiches instead of high quality and gourmet meals, poor and not satisfying accommodations instead of the advertised luxurious villas.

Billy McFarland, the main event organizer, in March 2018, decided to plead guilty to one count of wire fraud to defraud ticket buyers and investors, and as second count, while he

was out on bail, to have also defraud a ticket vendor. In October 2018, he was therefore sentenced to six years of prison and was required to forfeit US \$ 26 million (*U.S. authorities put Fyre Festival clothing up for auction*, 2020). In August 2020, more than three years after the failed event: 126 items from Fyre festival have been auctioned, with the aim of going toward the victims of Billy McFarland's fraud (Frishberg, 2020).

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The digital transformation of music has been dramatic in recent decays (McCourt, 2015), impacting all its dimensions. Here, we should mention in particular how visuals have been deeply associated to music, through videos and images, and how popular singers and players, as it has happened for actors and actresses, have found on social media a fertile ground where to grow their audiences and nurture them with a constant feed of audio-visual materials. These, in turn, have become an integral part of fashion imaginaries.

1.2.7 Sport

Sport is also a form of pop culture deeply rooted in the history of the society and connected with fashion history. Starting from Jesse Owens, one of the most well-known African American athletes: in 1936 in Berlin he was the first American athlete to win four gold medals in a single Olympic game, wearing the shoes designed by two German brothers Rudolf and Adolf Dassler, who later on founded respectively the companies Puma and Adidas. Adidas, to celebrate the athlete who contributed to make the brand known worldwide, in 2016 announced the Black History Month footwear collection inspired by Jesse Owens and realized in collaboration with his family (*A true American Hero – Jesse Owens*, 2017). Although the beginning of the influence of sports on fashion, and vice versa, can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, it is the 21st century that contributed to strengthen this connubium with sport players such as David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Michael Jordan, James LeBron, Kobe Bryant, Roger Federer, Serena Williams, Marija Sharapova, Tiger Woods and Lewis Hamilton. Their popularity crossed their sport fields and it also touched fashion, where they have become

worldwide trendsetters. It is not rare, in fact, to see their faces and bodies landing the front covers of magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle* and *GQ*; walking red carpets such as the Met Ball, film festivals and awards shows; and taking part to Fashion Weeks in London, Milan, New York and Paris. Sportsmen and women are no longer only advertising sportswear, but they have become ambassadors of luxury and casual brands or even entrepreneurs of themselves by creating their own fashion brands.

Since 2005, the NBA has a mandatory dress code that imposes players to wear dress coats, collared shirts and pants to NBA-related events off the court. David Stern, the NBA commissioner, who has taken this decision, explained that in the era after Jordan the NBA had to find its identity (Lieber, 2014). The idea that the NBA was getting married to hip-hop and thugs was not in his mind: that is why he decided to change the NBA fashion root, by making it more palatable. When basketball players join the NBA, the agencies representing them assign three key figures: a publicist, a trainer and also a stylist. NBA players have become brand ambassadors by proudly wearing sport Valentino suits, Rag & Bone tails, Versace statement button-downs, Tom Ford vests, MSGM bomber jackets and not rarely major trends are becoming directly attributed to their influence. For instance, in 2011 Durant started wearing backpacks during post-game conferences and suddenly these sport items spread everywhere. James Le Bron by wearing and advertising the headphones Beats contributed to make them a must-have fashion item and a matter of style (Lieber, 2014). Between 1984–1985 Nike launched the Air Jordan 1 sneakers: an homage to Michael Jordan that later on have become a real brand within Nike, which produces worldwide known basketball products not only for men but also for women and children (*Evolution of the Nike Air Jordan*, n.d.).

Also football has not been exempted from fashion incursions in the life of football players: from the David Beckham era football and fashion have merged, pushing many footballers to become models, influencers and sometimes even stylists while, at the same time, major brands began to launch collections inspired by the world of football. The sport champions of the third millennium have managed to impose themselves on the public opinion as actual celebrities, who by now have nothing to envy to film or television stars. For

instance, in Germany the football point of reference in the world of fashion has been Jérôme Boateng, who has been the ambassador of Bread&Butter, an annual fair organized by Zalando in Berlin; he has also founded a lifestyle magazine, BOA, to share his taste in looks (*Introducing BOA*17, 2018; Schlagwein, 2018).

Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, with respectively more than 300 million⁸ and 220 million⁹ followers on Instagram (as of end of June 2021) are among the most followed sportsmen in the world and with their styles and partnerships with luxury, sport and casual fashion brands such as Adidas, Armani, Nike, contribute to increase sales and visibility of such fashion brands. In 2013, Ronaldo launched his brand CR7 through an underwear collection which later on was amplified by adding other fashion products such as shoes, denim items and perfumes; while in 2019 Lionel Messi launched his fashion brand named Messi in collaboration with Ginny Hilfiger, Tommy's sister (Cristiano Ronaldo, n.d.; Hicks, 2019; Zhang, 2019).

When it comes to tennis, the Swiss Roger Federer, the US Serena Williams and the Russian Marija Sharapova are to be mentioned here as fashion trend-setters. Federer frequently appears on the front row of fashion shows and appears to be a good friend of Anna Wintour. He has been Nike, Rolex and Uniqlo brand ambassador and in 2020 he has been voted as the most stylish man of the decade by *US GQ*, contributing to transform tennis into a growing fashion powerhouse (Basu, 2009; Riley, 2020). Among women, the tennis players Serena Williams and Marija Sharapova are considered not only top players in their field but are also rooted in fashion by making their appearance on the cover magazines of *Elle*, *Harper Bazaar*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, etc. Furthermore, their stylish outfits worn during the most important tennis matches, as it also happened for Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer, have become iconic: brands such as Nike, Uniqlo, Lacoste, Adidas have benefitted from partnering with them, in order to gain new

⁸ www.instagram.com/cristiano/.

⁹ www.instagram.com/leomessi/.

customers and get larger audiences (Barsamian, 2018; Criss, 2019; Kambhampaty, 2019; *Serena Williams's February 2018 Vogue Cover*, 2018).

The fashion field has been also touched by many other sports: further examples are Formula 1 and Golf. The former has been represented by racers such as Louis Hamilton, who apart from being considered among the world's richest sportsmen, is also considered by many a style icon, having become a fixture on the fashion week circuit. In 2018, Hamilton partnered with the designer Tommy Hilfiger to launch the collection TommyxLouis, which in 2020 became a fully vegan and sustainable collection; in 2019, he designed the 10-style eyewear collection for the eyewear brand Police (*Formula One Champion Lewis Hamilton Introduces Sustainable Clothing*, n.d.; Fraser, n.d.; Halliday, 2019; Kai, 2018; *The Style Evolution Of Lewis Hamilton*, 2020). Golf, on the other hand, boasts protagonists such as Tiger Woods. Tiger has been Nike's testimonial since 1996 and despite the scandals that involved him, the company still proposes on its website the Tiger Woods Collection (Rishe, 2019; *Tiger Woods*, n.d.).

An element that keeps fashion brands so deeply connected with sport players, is related to the concept of endorsement (Chung et al., 2013; Do et al., 2015). As empirically demonstrated by Chung et al. (2013), endorsements can have a strong impact on consumer utility, such that there is a shift in market share and fashion companies are led more and more often to pay a large amount of money to featured sport players in order to increase their brand visibility and their sales.

Another sport that can be considered strongly connected with fashion is dance, which can be either considered a form of art expression or a sport depending on the contexts in which it is practiced. Within fashion shows dance is increasingly used by designers to showcase their collections: brands such as Alexander McQueen, Moncler, Oteyza, Stella McCartney, Tommy Hilfiger and Victoria's Secret have often chosen dance to present their collections during the catwalks (Bateman, 2015; Remsen, 2019). Furthermore, dance icons of the past and of the present, such as Anna Pavlova, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rudolf Nureyev, Fred

Astaire, Martha Graham, Hrithik Roshan, Michael Jackson and Madonna have made their own fashion statements through the 20th and 21st centuries.

A very interesting story – almost a contemporary sport and fashion tale – is the one of Allyson Felix, who has become the most decorated U.S. track athlete in Olympic history with eleven medals. In 2018, she was offered by Nike – her official sponsor – a 70% reduction of contract due to her pregnancy, a case she brought to the public opinion through an article in *The New York Times* (Felix, 2019). After ending the contract, she decided to set-up her own shoe line, establishing the Saysh company: at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics she ran and won running in her own shoes (Bhasin, 2021).

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In fact, Nike has played a major role among the sport brands that are deeply involved in the digital transformation and its “popularization”. A first collaboration between the tech company Apple and the fashion brand can be traced back to 2006, when they launched Nike+iPod, a wireless system that would allow Nike’s footwear users to communicate with Apple iPod Nano. The idea behind such a combination was to bring the worlds of sport, music and technology together like never before. Since then, the collaboration has never stopped, and the two brands launched a series of items such as the Apple Watch Nike+ continuously improving wearable technologies for sport users (*Apple Watch Nike+ Edition Articles*, 2020).

Nike, however, has not been the only company to implement wearable technologies to improve sport experiences, another such example can be Under Armour.

The brand Under Armour, which benefitted largely from being featured in the Oliver Stone movie *Any Given Sunday* (1999), has celebrated its marriage with the digital world in 2015, when it acquired the following fitness apps: MapMyRun, Endomondo, and MyFitnessPal. In the following year, it also launched its “smart” shoe series (Under Armour, n.d.).

Such combination of sport practices, wearable sensors and mobile apps is spreading all over the sport world, making fitness a major fashion and style-related trend. A trend that, for instance, has been able to dramatically extend the usages – and related sales – of sneakers, well beyond actual training practices (Hancock, 2019).

1.2.8 Other Interplays

Not only tales, photography, cinema, television, music, and sport interplay with the fashion industry within the context of pop culture: video games, museums, tourism and international events have been impacted and have impacted on fashion – and still do.

In 2015, Louis Vuitton inspired its spring-summer collection to *Final Fantasy*, a video game. Nicolas Ghesquière, the creative director with a strong passion for fantasy, chose Lightning, a character from *Final Fantasy*, as its muse to present Louis Vuitton's campaign. Her pink hair and the angelic face seduced the director of the brand, who explained that his intent was to converge digital, visual and cybernetic aspects with real life (Kim, 2016).

Another field converging with fashion through pop culture is tourism. Many cities around the world benefit every year from fashion weeks that count millions of visitors (Gravari-Barbas & Kalbaska, *forth.*; Kalbaska et al., 2018a). In popular culture, fashion style is mainly dominated by Paris, which is seen as the fashion capital “par excellence”.

Paris started to gain the role of fashion capital during the reign of Louis XIV first, and the one of Queen Marie Antoinette later, becoming not only the beating political hearth of Europe but also the center of increasing influence in terms of fashion trends by opening the court to the advent of fashion labels and personal dressmakers (Godart, 2014; Kurkdjian, 2021).

The central position of Paris built from Versailles' epoche was further established and reinforced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the spread of fashion magazines that contributed to create the myth of Paris, celebrating its designers, its manufacturers and inventions but also by the birth of the haute couture and the presence of a strong textile

industry. It was only at the end of the twentieth century that London, Milan and New York together with Paris established themselves as “fashion capitals” contributing to the birth of the so-called “fashion oligarchy” (Godart, 2014).

According to Godart (2014) there is still no consensus among scholars on which are the characteristics that describe a fashion capital, although he suggests defining them according to the presence of a well-established “Fashion Week” show with a global or international spread on fashion magazines. The status of fashion capitals has not only brought to those cities high media coverage and popularity during the fashion weeks, but also huge incomes derived from the services and the works generated by them.

This condition of fashion capital has helped cities such as London, Milan, New York, and Paris to strengthen the collective thinking and also their status of fashion tourist destinations.

Among the major international events that celebrated the connubium among fashion, cinema, music, sport and also tourism, there is the Super Bowl. During the 2020 Super Bowl match between Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco, which brought to Miami thousands of American football passionates, the singers Shakira and the actress and singer J. Lo performed and gave place to a planetary event watched by 148.5 million of people and reaching 69% of share. During the performances J. Lo changed into different Versace outfits, including a silver bodysuit and a feathered cape painted with Puerto Rican and American flags, to celebrate her heritage and origins, while Shakira wore custom-made designs from Norwegian designer Peter Dundas (Adgate, 2021; Alleyne, 2020; Sernagiotto, 2020).

Michael Jackson in 1993 was the first who used the Super Bowl to communicate his beliefs against violence, war and injustice through his music and by pushing the envelope through his outfit by wearing a uniform. Other artists who utilized the Super Bowl as a stage to convey their messages and to communicate through their music and their clothing choices

have been Katy Perry, Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake, Prince, Madonna, Beyoncé, and Lady Gaga (Alleyne, 2020).

After having followed the first path, our exploration of fashion and popular culture will now take a second itinerary, which focuses on fashion exhibitions and on dedicated fashion museums: the extreme interest and large publics they are able to attract bear a clear testimony to the role of fashion within (popular) culture.

1.3 *Fashion in Museums and Exhibitions*

Museums and exhibitions have not been exempted from the impact of fashion: temporary and permanent fashion exhibitions, in fact, have become a great source of attraction for fashion passionates and tourists coming from all over the world and have become an increasingly important forum for fashion brands. In fact, fashion has been treated initially as the “Cinderella” of the arts, occupying a marginal place in exhibitions, mainly due to an hostility traditionally traceable to the low status that fashion occupies within academia and to the disagreements between academics and curators on the role of museums in the present society and about “fashion” and its relationship with (popular) culture (Bass-Krueger et al., 2020; Steele, 2008). After having established itself within art museums in expositions offered by the Imperial War Museum, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met), the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, fashion has found its route through the establishment of permanent fashion museums such as the Palais Galliera Museum, the Dior Granville Museum, the Museum Yves Saint Laurent, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, the Armani Silos and the Museum Audemars Piguet.

Furthermore, the recognition by UNESCO of practices and traditions related to fashion has played an important role in rising fashion to the level of recognized cultural phenomena; think for instance to the *savoir faire* of watchmakers, the manufacturing of artisanal clothes and textiles such as the wedding costume tradition of Tlemcen, the

Azerbaijani carpet weaving, or the Indonesian Batik textile production (*Indonesian Batik*, n.d.; UNESCO, 2003).

In the following paragraphs, just a few cases will be presented, to exemplify a category that is constantly growing, including large collections in general museums, private collections, museums dedicated to fashion or to specific sub-sectors (e.g., the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto, Canada) or to individual designers/ companies.

The chosen museums have been listed as follows: first of all, starting from the ones that use fashion items as part of more extensive exhibitions, then moving to museums fully dedicated to fashion and finally to digital platforms. Within each category, museums have been ordered according to their date of foundation.

1.3.1 Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A)

The history of the V&A began in 1852 when the British government created the Museum of Manufacturers in Marlborough House, St. James, to house a collection of decorative art objects that had been displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace. In 1857, to improve taste and knowledge among British manufactures, the British government moved the items to the South Kensington Museum and redisplayed the collection, obtaining surprising results and laying the premises for developing a new museum. The museum has been renamed “Victoria and Albert Museum” in 1899, when Queen Victoria charged Aston Webb to design the current building, which has been opened to the public in 1909 (*Building the museum*, n.d.).

Since its foundation, the V&A has constantly evolved in its collections and in its public interpretation of art and design; however, its mission to further deepen the standards of British industry by educating designers, manufacturers and consumers in art and science has remained (*About us V&A*, n.d.). The V&A is also responsible for the Museum of Childhood, in Bethnal Green, a district in the borough of Tower Hamlets, and the V&A Dundee, an outpost of the museum centering on Scottish design, opened in Scotland in 2018 (*Hunt*, 2018).

The V&A is considered among the world's leading museums of art and design, housing a permanent collection of over 2.3 million items that span over 5,000 years of humanity. The Museum holds many UK national collections and hosts a vast heritage valuable for studies in architecture, Asian art and design, book arts, ceramics, glass, fashion, furniture, jewelry, metal work, painting, photography, sculpture, textiles, as well as theatre and performance (*About us V&A*, n.d.).

Among its valuable collections, V&A hosts a permanent exhibition of fashion objects, including items spanning five centuries. However, the collection focuses mainly on the 18th century onwards, mostly presenting European fashion and accessories, such as 18th century 'Mantua' dresses or the 19th century with dresses utilized by the élites in India, China and Japan. It also includes 20th century elements such as 1930s eveningwear, 1960s daywear and post-war couture. It also includes a wide range of accessories from across the world, including footwear and hats and collections of Cristóbal Balenciaga, Pierre Cardin and many other past and contemporary designers (*Fashion V&A*, n.d.).

Apart from permanently exhibiting such a variety of fashion items, the V&A leaves room also for temporary exhibits such as the *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* exhibition, which in 2015 has become the second most visited V&A exhibition with 493,043 people visiting it during its 21-week run. *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (2011) is also included in the 10 most visited exhibitions at Met, where it attracted 661,509 visitors during its run from May 4 to August 7 (661,509 *Total Visitors to Alexander McQueen*, 2011). Kordic (2015) reported that *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* exhibition's official website has had some 2.3 million unique visits, in addition to 134,000 clicks at The Museum of Savage Beauty (*The Museum of Savage Beauty*, n.d.), a specially commissioned interactive web page, which provided insights and additional stories and information about techniques behind some of the items presented during the exhibition. V&A also offered memberships to ensure the viewing of Alexander McQueen's most popular exhibition to its visitors, thus welcoming 10,000 new members during the show run (Kordic, 2015).

In order to fulfill such an unprecedented demand for the final two weekends the exhibition was available also throughout the night (Muñoz-Alonso, 2015). *Savage Beauty* occupied several spaces in the V&A Museum through different thematic rooms, starting with McQueen's early collections to its more recent pieces where the designer expressed all his passion for fashion by combining it with his interest in anthropology, gothic elements, and by reinterpreting romanticism and other periods through his perspective and style (*Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty – About the Exhibition*, 2015).

The primacy of the most visited exhibition at the V&A is detained by another fashion exhibit *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams* (2019). Such event is considered the most comprehensive exhibition ever staged in the UK on the House of Dior, with its 594,994 visitors (Young, 2019).

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The V&A Museum offers to its audience a website¹⁰ in which users can find all the information concerning upcoming exhibitions and the services offered by the Institution (V&A, n.d.). Concerning its social media strategy, V&A is active on Facebook,¹¹ Instagram,¹² Pinterest¹³ and Twitter,¹⁴ beside running a highly successful channel on YouTube.¹⁵ Taking into consideration the number of followers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, *The Art Newspaper* in 2020 classified V&A as the 10th most followed museum in the world with more than 3.3 million of followers (Dawson, 2020).

1.3.2 Met and Its Gala

¹⁰ www.vam.ac.uk.

¹¹ www.facebook.com/victoriaandalbertmuseum.

¹² www.instagram.com/vamuseum/.

¹³ www.pinterest.ch/vamuseum/_created/.

¹⁴ twitter.com/V_and_A.

¹⁵ www.youtube.com/user/vamuseum.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's roots can be traced back to 1866 in Paris, France, when a group of American citizens realized the importance to create a "national institution and gallery of art" to spread art education towards America (*History of the museum*, n.d.). As soon as the lawyer John Jay, who came up with the idea, returned to America, he gave birth to his project in the city of New York and through the Union League Club he rallied leaders, managers, artists, art collectors, and philanthropists to join his project. In April 1870, The Metropolitan Museum of Art was incorporated and opened its doors to the public in the Dodworth Building at 681 Fifth Avenue. In November the museum acquired as its first object a Roman sarcophagus. In 1871, among the 174 European paintings that entered the collection were included works by Anthony van Dyck, Nicolas Poussin, and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. The museum's collection continued to expand throughout the rest of the 19th century and by the 20th century, up to becoming one of the world's most-known art centers (*History of the museum*, n.d.). Nowadays, the Met has got more than 1.5 million objects spread over 2 million square feet, employs nearly 1,600 staff members and it is visited yearly by 7 million visitors coming from all over the world (*Making the Met*, n.d.).

Met's Costume Institute is to be presented here. It began as the Museum of Costume Art, an independent entity formed in 1937 and directed by Irene Lewisohn, the Neighborhood Playhouse founder. In 1946, with the financial support of the fashion industry, the museum merged with The Metropolitan Museum of Art becoming The Costume Institute, and in 1959 it was transformed into a curatorial department (*The Costume Institute*, n.d.).

Considering more in detail the place of fashion within Met, the journalist Diana Vreeland has played a major role: she worked as special consultant, from 1972 until 1989 she created at the Costume Institute a memorable suite of exhibitions, including *Inventive Clothes/1909–39* (1973); *The World of Balenciaga* (1973); *The Glory of Russian Costume* (1976); and *Vanity Fair* (1977), which set the grounds for the spread of costume exhibitions globally. At the end of the 20th century, Richard Martin together with Harold Koda began a series of thematic exhibitions including *Infra-Apparel*; *Waist Not*; *The Four Seasons*; and *Cubism and Fashion*. Martin's work at Met culminated in *Rock Style*, the

last exhibition before he died in 1999. Mr. Koda, who had previously left the Institute, rejoined it in 2000 until 2016 as curator in charge, he was then followed by Andrew Bolton, Wendy Yu Curator (*The Costume Institute*, n.d.).

Within the Costume Institute, one or two special exhibitions are on stage every year, among them: monographic exhibitions such as *Chanel* (2005); *Poiret: King of Fashion* (2007); *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (2011); *Charles James: Beyond Fashion* (2014); and *Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between* (2017). We can list here also thematic exhibitions such as *AngloMania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion* (2006); *Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy* (2008); *The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion* (2009); *American Woman: Fashioning a National Identity* (2010); *Schiaparelli and Prada:*

Impossible Conversations (2012); *PUNK: Chaos to Couture* (2013); *China: Through the Looking Glass* (2015); *Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology* (2016); *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* (2018); and *Notes on Camp* (2018), inspired by Susan Sontag's 1964 essay in which she defined camp as a passion for the "unnatural" (Sontag, 2018; *The Costume Institute*, n.d.).

The thematic exhibition *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* deserves a special mention, since it has become the most visited exhibition in the history of the Met Museum, being visited by 1,659,647 visitors from May 10 to October 8, 2018. It did exceed the prior number one show, *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (1978), which had been visited by 1,360,957 people (*1,659,647 Visitors to Costume Institute's Heavenly Bodies*, 2018).

To keep raising funds, the Costume Institute benefits from The Met Gala, an event whose main goal is to raise annual funding for the department's exhibitions, acquisitions, and capital improvements. Born from an idea of Eleanor Lambert, the event has been introduced for the first time in 1948 as a midnight supper and dubbed "The Party of the Year" (Chilton, 2020). Co-chairs in past years included Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

(1977, 1978) and Patricia Taylor Buckley (1979–1995), Miuccia Prada (1998, 2012) and Oprah Winfrey (2010) (Shaw, 2021; *The Costume Institute*, n.d.).

Each first Monday of May, the Gala celebrates the overture of the spring exhibition, in more recent years under the guidance of Anna Wintour, artistic director of Condé Nast and editor-in-chief of *Vogue*: she has been co-chair since 1995, excluding 1996 and 1998. The Gala has turned into one of the most anticipated charity events, collecting guests not only from the world of fashion but also from those of cinema, society, sports, business, and music (Chilton, 2020).

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From a digital perspective, to be mentioned is also the Met website,¹⁶ which, despite it does not offer digital recurrent exhibitions, every year attracts over 30 million users interested in exploring its offerings (*Making the Met*, n.d.). Moreover, the website together with Met social media accounts have been widely exploited during the Covid19 pandemic to offer a series of initiatives in order to let Met audiences access and enjoy its collections, programs, and educational contents while the museum was temporarily closed due to the restrictions (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art Announces*, 2020). Met is nowadays present on the following social media platforms: Facebook,¹⁷ Instagram,¹⁸ Pinterest,¹⁹ Twitter²⁰ and YouTube.²¹ According to Dawson (2020), considering the number of followers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Met could be deemed the second most followed museum in the world, with almost 9.8 million followers, only preceded by MoMa with 12.4 million followers in 2020. To develop its strategy, Met has currently two people fully devoted to the development of a social media strategy (Dawson, 2020).

¹⁶ www.metmuseum.org.

¹⁷ www.facebook.com/metmuseum.

¹⁸ www.instagram.com/metmuseum/.

¹⁹ www.pinterest.ch/metmuseum/_created/.

²⁰ twitter.com/metmuseum.

²¹ www.youtube.com/user/metmuseum.

1.3.3 Palais Galliera

In May 1878, the Duchess of Galliera made it known that she wished to bequeath her art collection to the French nation, on condition that it would be displayed in a museum she would have financed and which was to be set in a square with specially created streets on both sides to be named Rue Brignole and Rue Galliera. The museum itself would have also to bear the name Brignole-Galliera in her honor (*History of the building*, n.d.). The Paris City Council accepted her proposal in July 1878 and the Duchess commissioned its construction (*History of the building*, n.d.).

Although the Paris City Council immediately accepted the Duchess proposal some vicissitudes forced the Duchess to change her plans and in 1884 she decided to bequeath her art collection to Palazzo Rosso in Genoa. Although the Duchess never exhibited her collection in Paris, she decided to finance the completion of the palace and that it would have immediately become a property of the city of Paris. After her death in 1888, the building was completed in 1894 (*History of the building*, n.d.).

In 1895, thanks also to the writer and historian Maurice Quentin-Bauchart, it was decided to dedicate the building's spaces to the creation of a museum of industrial design, to dispel the prejudice of the early 20th century that art applied to industry was inferior to the great art forms of architecture, sculpture and painting (*History of the building*, n.d.). Then, in 1954 the first of the annual exhibitions of the *Peintres Témoins de Leurs Temps* was presented in a renovated Palais Galliera (*History of the building*, n.d.).

Meanwhile, the city of Paris was increasingly establishing itself as a fashion capital and interest in historical and contemporary costume was growing, thanks also to the presence of figures such as the painter, historian and collector Maurice Leloir (1853–1940), who founded the Société de l'Histoire du Costume (SHC) in 1907 and donated his remarkable collection to the city of Paris in 1920. On Leloir's death, Georges-Gustave Toudouze took over the presidency of the SHC, which still lacked a place where the public could admire its pieces (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

Initially, the City of Paris temporarily exhibited SHC's collection at the Cercle Volney while at the same time the curators of the Musée Carnavalet, to which part of SHC's collection had previously been donated by the City of Paris, and the directors of SHC, agreed to use the most iconic pieces to convince the Paris City Council of the desirability of a permanent showcase for the collection. The first exhibition at the Cercle Volney triggered the initial funding from the City Council for a costume museum and in 1954 the project became definitive: several rooms on the ground floor of the Musée Carnavalet were renovated and dedicated exclusively to the presentation of the SHC collection (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

The exhibitions at the Musée Carnavalet were immediately received with enthusiasm by the public, and donations began to arrive. It soon became clear that a more suitable venue was needed and in 1955 a large room on the ground floor of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris was chosen. Considered an annex of the Musée Carnavalet, the Musée du Costume was officially opened on 23 November 1956, with Madeleine Delpierre as chief curator (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

In 1971, however, the museum was forced to close when its ceiling collapsed. After the transfer of the collection to the Musée Carnavalet, the city of Paris decided to opt for the Palais Galliera, which in 1977 finally welcomed the Musée du Costume, making it the *Musée de la Mode et du Costume* and taking over the Palais Galliera (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

The new independent institution inherited the costume and accessories collection of the Musée Carnavalet and, with Madeleine Delpierre still at the helm, joined the group of fourteen Musées de la Ville de Paris (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

The 1980s led to an increase in the pieces collected and to the creation of two new departments: Prints and Drawings in 1984, and the Contemporary department in 1987. After Guillaume Garnier's death in 1989, Catherine Join-Diéterle succeeded (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

In 1994 on a new 4,800-square-meter site in Paris, the museum opened the restoration workshop and the storerooms dedicated to the conservation of the museum's garments and accessories. In 1997, a second change of name occurred and from Musée de la Mode et du Costume de la Ville de Paris the museum became the *Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris* – the City of Paris Fashion Museum. In 2002, the museum obtained the official accreditation of *Musée de France* (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

In 2010, Olivier Saillard succeeded to Catherine Join-Diéterle as director, and under his management further improvements were done to the museum, which had been closed in 2009 and reopened in September 2013. At the time, it changed its name for the third time becoming the *Palais Galliera* promoting a return to the roots in the spirit of its original architect Paul-René-Léon Ginain (*Creation of the museum*, n.d.).

The Musée de la Mode et du Costume at Palais Galliera offers nowadays a varied collection of fashion pieces, which reflects the codes of clothing in France from the 18th century until contemporary fashion, including nearly 200,000 items such as clothing, accessories, photographs, drawings, etc. (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.).

Due to the fragility of its collections, the museum presents its monographic exhibitions (e.g., Givenchy, Fath, Carven, Grès, Alaïa, Jeanne Lanvin, Fortuny, Martin Margiela) and thematic ones (e.g., The History of Jeans, Japonisme in Fashion, Fashion and Gardens, The Roaring Twenties, Sous l'Empire des Crinolines) periodically renewing and substituting the pieces presented in order to protect and preserve them (*Restore, preserve and exhibit the collection*, n.d.).

The museum includes different departments: (i) 18th century dress, which encompasses indicatively 1,600 items, comprising men's and women's garments dating from the late 17th century to the year 1800, together with children's wear and theatre costumes; it offers reminders of France's royal past, such as dresses worn by Louis XVII and Marie-Antoinette (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (ii) 19th century costume, which presents items worn by Comtesse Greffulhe and the Empress Josephine. The department

encompasses 5,300 items, which recounts the history of fashion among France's upper classes from the Napoléonic period to around 1906, when Paul Poiret's *Directoire* style dresses inaugurated the 20th century of fashion (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (iii) Fashion of the first half of the 20th century, which goes from the beginning of the 20th century to the appearance of Christian Dior's New Look in 1947, accumulating over 4,000 items. Among them pieces designed by stylists such as Balenciaga, Callot Soeurs, Chanel, Chéruit, Doeillet, Doucet Nicole Groult, Jacques Heim, Lucien Lelong, Jeanne Lanvin, Molyneux and Elsa Schiaparelli (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (iv) Haute Couture: the department comprises over 7,000 labelled items from some thirty different designers, including the creative diversity of Paris's couture houses by showing Dior, Balenciaga, Chanel, Grès, Carven, Fath and Balmain, Yves Saint Laurent, Courrèges, Paco Rabanne and Pierre Cardin and providing graphic illustrations by Christian Lacroix and by John Galliano for Christian Dior. Within the concept of *Haute couture*, the museum includes all those luxurious clothes pieces, typically Parisian, which were created for women: the garments were to be created in their entirety according to the client's measurements, using the finest materials and handcraft. The breaking point for the museum is the 1947, after the austere War years, when the couturier Christian Dior left his stamp on the history of fashion in the form of a new silhouette, disrupting the fashion codes by creating his spring-summer haute couture collection, which fashion editors christened as The New Look, giving birth to the golden age of Parisian haute couture (the 1950s) (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (v) Contemporary Department: it includes pieces which are dated from early 1950s and illustrate the beginnings of ready-to-wear as pioneered by historic brands like Lempereur and Weill, it includes different groupings, that signal the evolution of French fashion from the mid-20th century to the most recent fashion production: ready-to-wear pieces, licensed lines, street fashion and the mass-produced clothes to be found in big cities across all over the world (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (vi) Undergarments. This department has a collection of some 5,000 items of lingerie, underwear and corsetry, which includes women's undergarments dating from the early 19th century until present days (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (vii) Accessories: it collects nearly 35,000 pieces from the 17th century until present times including hats, shoes, bags and purses, muffs,

scarves, jewelry, fans, walking sticks, parasols, umbrellas, gloves, buttons, buckles (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (viii) Print and Drawing department houses nearly 55,000 items from the 18th century until nowadays and it includes prints, drawings, invoices and advertisements. The collection also includes a varied selection of engravings from fashion journals from the late 18th to the early 20th century, among them *Le Journal des Dames et des Demoiselles*, *La Mode Illustrée*, *Le Moniteur de la Mode* and *L'Art et la Mode* (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.). (ix) Photography department, which comprehends two major types of photography emerging from this mass of materials: professional and promotional ones. The photographic collection does not only retrace the history of fashion photography, clothes and the haute couturier lives, but it also considers the ways in which fashion has been advertised and the ways in which the human body has been depicted throughout different historical periods (*Collection, Palais Galliera*, n.d.).

The museum underwent between 2018 and 2020 through a period of restoration, which allowed it to enlarge its spaces to envisage temporary exhibitions from time to time. The museum was first said to reopen on March 31st, 2020, but due to Covid19 the opening was postponed to October 1, 2020 (Darrivière, 2020; *Palais Galliera to close for refurbishment until spring 2020*, 2019). New refurbishments indicatively include 670 extra square meters of galleries devoted to the upcoming exhibitions. The new areas have been named after Gabrielle Chanel to which the museum has devoted its first exhibition *Gabrielle Chanel, manifeste de mode* from May 19 to July 18, 2021 (Darrivière, 2020; Darrivière, 2021).

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Palais Galliera also offers to its visitors a comprehensive website²² in which it is possible not only to deepen the history of the museum, to book tickets and plan workshops, to discover current and planned temporary exhibitions, it also provides additional information for professionals and researchers, and offers the opportunity to see some

²² www.palaisgalliera.paris.fr.

online pieces. As of 2021 the social media presence of the museum includes Facebook,²³ Instagram²⁴ and Twitter²⁵ overall almost 80,000 followers (as of June 29, 2021). The website also promotes a series of applications connected to the museum such as Second Canvas (*Covid-19: discover our collections from your home!*, n.d.).

1.3.4 Museum Dior Granville

The museum devoted to Christian Dior (1905–1957) was founded in 1997 at Villa Les Rhumbs, Christian Dior's childhood home in Granville, Normandy, not far from Mont St. Michel. The Villa was built by the shipowner Beust in the late 19th century and it was named "Les Rhumbs" due to the fact that the old marine symbol Rhumb, designating a wind rose divided into 32 rhumbs, appeared as a mosaic floor ornament in one of the house's entrances. It was bought by Christian Dior's parents in 1905. In 1932, after Christian Dior's mother Madeleine's death, the father, an industrial ruined by the crisis, sold the property, which was bought by the town of Granville, which opened its garden to the public in 1938 ("*Les Rhumbs*", n.d.).

According to Christian Dior autobiography *Christian Dior et moi* the designer was attached to the family house, and he wrote that his style and his life owed almost everything to the site and architecture of his old house ("*Les Rhumbs*", n.d.).

The idea of turning villa Les Rhumbs into a place dedicated to Christian Dior's memory and design became a real project only at the end of the 20th century, driven by the curator Jean-Luc Dufresne, the couturier's cousin (*The history of the Christian Dior Museum*, n.d.).

In 1991, the association *Présence de Christian Dior* was founded to work on donations, while until 1995 the town of Granville was in charge of the acquisitions of Dior's pieces.

²³ www.facebook.com/PalaisGalliera/.

²⁴ www.instagram.com/palais_galliera/.

²⁵ twitter.com/PalaisGalliera.

Since 1995, the association *Présence de Christian Dior* has also become the point of reference of the acquisitions' collaborating with many stakeholders such as the Dior Couture and Dior Perfumes, LVMH company, the town of Granville, and the regional acquisition fund for the museums (*The history of the Christian Dior Museum*, n.d.).

In 1997, the villa became the Christian Dior Museum, the only – so far unique – *Musée de France* labeled museum dedicated to a couturier ("*Les Rhumbs*", n.d.). In the same year, the creation of "showcase rooms" allowed the museum to present its collections under better conditions and to regularly open the spaces to the public (*The history of the Christian Dior Museum*, n.d.). In the year 2005, the centenary of the couturier's birth, the *Christian Dior, man of the century* exhibition has been organized, which gave to the museum a national recognition (*The history of the Christian Dior Museum*, n.d.).

The Christian Dior Museum regularly calls on lenders' services to realize new exhibitions, nevertheless, the collections that it owns are becoming larger and larger every year. The museum acquires regularly new pieces (nearly 20 items per year from private individuals or in auction-rooms), to implement and complete its collections it benefits also from donations (*Collections*, n.d.).

Afterwards, the acquisitions are inventoried in an archive, allowing the museum to renew as much as possible the exhibitions, offering to the visitors the opportunity to discover, but also to gather up at the Christian Dior Museum a representative collection of the couturier's work (*Collections*, n.d.).

The association that runs the museum organizes since 2010 an autumn– winter exhibition: *Une maison, des collections*, presenting its permanent items and its most recent acquisitions (*The history of the Christian Dior Museum*, n.d.).

In June 2012, the museum also received the *Maison des Illustres* label from the Ministry of Culture (*The history of the Christian Dior Museum*, n.d.).

Since 1997 the following exhibitions have taken place in the museum: *Woman on Stage* (1997); *Tradition of Elegance* (1998); *Fashion and Travel* (1999); *Dior: Lifestyles* (2000); *Dior, In the Garden* (2001); *Dior, Fauna and Flora* (2002); *Dior, Architect of Fashion* (2003); *Dior, Fashion and Uniforms* (2004); *Christian Dior ... Man of the Century* (2005); *Christian Dior and The World* (2006); *Dior, 60 Colourful Years* (2007); *Dandyisms. From Barbey d'Aurevilly to Christian Dior* (2008); *Dior, The Bohan Years. Three decades of styles and stars* (2009); *Le Grand Bal Dior* (2010); *Dior, The Artists Ball* (2011); *Stars in Dior* (2012); *Dior Impressions* (2013); *Dior, The Legendary Images* (2014); *Dior, The New Look Revolution* (2015); *Women in Dior. Sublime Elegance of a Portrait* (2016); *Christian Dior & Granville* (2017); *Treasures of the Collections, 30 years of acquisitions* (2018); *Grace of Monaco, Princess in Dior* (2019); and *Christian Dior, A Career in Couture* (2020) (*Exhibitions since 1997*, n.d.).

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The museum offers to its visitors a quite descriptive website:²⁶ in fact, it does not offer the opportunity to book tickets, workshops or buy products but informs potential visitors about the story of the museum, exhibitions, the personal story of Dior, the Association and it provides practical information about how to reach the museum and what people can find in its shop. The Christian Dior Museum offers visitors in the section related to the collection a link to the website “Les Collections du Réseau des Musées de Normandie” in which it is possible to visualize 1525 digitalized items which can be consulted according to different categorizations (Les Collections du Réseau des Musées de Normandie, n.d.). Christian Dior Museum is also present on Facebook,²⁷ Instagram,²⁸ and on Twitter²⁹ with in total about 20,000 followers (as of June 29, 2021).

²⁶ musee-dior-granville.com.

²⁷ www.facebook.com/musee.christiandior/.

²⁸ www.instagram.com/museediorgranville/.

²⁹ twitter.com/museedior.

1.3.5 Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa created by the Foundation named after Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972) opened on June 7th, 2011 with the goal to spread and underline the figure and work of the designer. The museum is situated not far from Balenciaga birthplace at Getaria, a small fishermen village in the Basque Country, on the north cost of Spain. The museum is housed in an annex of Palacio Aldamar, a villa located on a hill overlooking Getaria, and which was the residence of the Marquesses of Casa Torres, Queen Fabiola's of Belgium grandparents and mentors of Balenciaga during the first stages of his career (*Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum: Preserving and Sharing a Heritage*, n.d.).

Although Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum's main goals are to conserve, promote, highlight, and spread the work and the image of Cristóbal Balenciaga around the world and to ensure his contribution to the world of fashion and arts, in its spaces the museum does not only host exhibitions related to the designer and his works but, in rotation, it also presents temporary exhibitions connected to fashion and educational and leisure activities (*Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum: Preserving and Sharing a Heritage*, n.d.).

Furthermore, at the museum a stream of research focuses on the interpretation and the spread of intangible heritage connected with Balenciaga's history. The museum gives spaces in fact also to the artisans' work that surrounded the couturier by making a tribute to all those people who contributed to the success of the man and of the brand, helping him in giving shape and materiality to his collections. The project called "the hands that sew" since 2014 has aimed to determine not only the contribution of the numerous people who worked for Balenciaga over the time, but also the techniques they utilized and the idea they had of the couturier and his personality (*The hands that sew*, n.d.).

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum hosts one of the most comprehensive collections of creations realized by the designer Cristóbal Balenciaga, both considering the quantity and the quality of the pieces owned and to the timespan covered, which ranges from

Balenciaga's earliest stage of production to his final period (*Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum: Preserving and Sharing a Heritage*, n.d.).

It boasts a unique and varied collection of the designer's works mainly retrieved from donations of former clients and friends. It encompasses more than 3,000 items, including not only clothes and accessories but also sketches, fabric swatches, textiles, photographs, letters, toiles. The textile pieces are further complemented through a documentary archive that encompasses the Historical Archive of the Marquises of Casa-Torres, documents related to the Balenciaga House and the relations with its customers, drawings and fabric samples, images, photographs and a series of personal letters from and for the couturier. The museum's Conservation and Restoration department, apart from having developed criteria to handle the items and the collections, is also responsible to pursue extensive research, including studies on Balenciaga's private and professional life (*Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum: Preserving and Sharing a Heritage*, n.d.).

Among the past and present exhibitions, which have characterized the museum since its opening, we can mention the following ones: *Cristóbal Balenciaga. A Timeless Legacy* (2013–2017); *Balenciaga Master of Lace* (2016); *Balenciaga the Experience of Luxury* (2016); *Coal and Velvet. Views on Popular Costumes by Ortiz Echagüe and Balenciaga* (2016–2017); *Rachel L. Mellon Collection* (2017–2018); *Balenciaga. Revolution and Legacy* (2018–2019); *Cristóbal Balenciaga. Fashion and Heritage* (2018–2019); *Transmissions* (2018); *Distinción* (2019); *Cristóbal Balenciaga. Fashion and Heritage. Contexts* (2019–2020); *#Finaestampa_* (2019); *Fabiola from Belgium. A Royal Wedding* (2019); *Fashion and Heritage. Cristóbal* (2020–2021); and *Alaïa and Balenciaga. Sculptors of Shape* (2021) (*Collection, Balenciaga*, n.d.).

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Through the time, the museum has developed its digital communication thanks to a website³⁰ and a collaboration with Google Arts and Culture, which has enabled to provide

³⁰ www.cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com.

digital exhibitions. Examples are *Cristóbal Balenciaga. Fashion and Heritage*; and *Balenciaga and the Popular Costume (Digital Exhibitions, n.d.)*. In addition to that, the website offers a wide range of information about the current and past exhibitions, the history of the museum, learning activities, and provides the possibility to directly buy tickets. As for the social media presence, it is present on Facebook,³¹ Instagram,³² Twitter³³ and YouTube,³⁴ with indicatively 40,000 followers. The YouTube account could not be considered since it did not display the number of people registered (as of June 29, 2021).

1.3.6 Armani Silos

On April 30th, 2015 the Italian designer Giorgio Armani (1934-) opened Armani Silos in Milan, to celebrate 40 years of his career. Giorgio Armani's relation with the city of Milan can be dated back to 1957, when the stylist moved to the city to improve his career by founding his company and by making Milan his home (*Armani/Silos, n.d.; Armani Silos Exhibition Space, 2018*). The building, a former industrial warehouse, was chosen by the designer to establish his exposition place also due its characteristic lights and geometric lines, which perfectly matched with Armani's style and way of thinking. The spaces measure around 4,500 square meters, are displayed on four levels and host a permanent outfit collection that spans from the 1980s to the present day, retracing Armani's evolution of style and proposing highlights from the stylist's career path in the fashion industry, as well as temporary exhibitions dedicated to different artists. The spaces also include a gift shop, an open-plan indoor coffee shop, and a digital archive (*About the exhibition space, n.d.*).

³¹ www.facebook.com/cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.

³² www.instagram.com/cristobalbalenciagamuseoa/.

³³ twitter.com/museobalenciaga.

³⁴ www.youtube.com/user/cbalenciagamuseoa.

The space has been set up to present Armani's aesthetic ideas and to elevate and celebrate creative talent by housing contemporary artists exhibitions and acting as a research center for students and researchers (*Armani/Silos*, n.d.).

The permanent collection showcases a selection of over forty years' Armani fashion creations and collections presented according to three main recurring themes, central to the designer's work and which continue to inspire his collections: (i) Androgynous: simple, pure and clean-cut fashion. Throughout his interpretation of the jacket, Armani reinterprets the concepts of androgyny by exposing pieces that are characterized by the use of neutral colors, the reinterpretation of male fabrics, the convey of the concepts of understated, discreet femininity and elegance. (ii) Ethnicities: Armani's creations present within this thematic section are the ones, which have been impacted by non-western cultures using and reinterpreting elements retraceable within far away ethnicities. Africa, China, Japan, Persia, Arabia, Syria and Polynesia are some of the sources of inspiration for the stylist. (iii) Stars: the interconnection of Armani with cinema is presented within this thematic area, where clothes worn by celebrities, both on screen and on the red carpet are displayed (*Permanent collection*, n.d.). Among the temporary exhibitions at Armani Silos there are *Emotions of the Athletic Body* (2017); *The Beats and the Vanities. Larry Fink* (2017); *Racconti Immaginari by Paolo Ventura* (2018); *Italian panorama* (2018); *From One Season to Another by Sarah Moon* (2018–2019); *Fabula by Charles Fregér* (2019); *The Challenge – Tadao Ando* (2019); *About Future: Architecture. Cities, Environment, Models and Visions* (2019); *Accents of Style* (2019–2020); and *Heimat. A Sense of Belonging* (2021) (*Past exhibitions*, n.d.).

As Armani explained (Stevens, 2015), the necessity to decide what to exhibit and how within Armani Silos has become a way for him to reflect on the main themes that represented his style and career path, contributing to the development of a museum that does not only present his career, but that also contributes to present to the society how fashion accompanies and often anticipates important social changes.

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Armani Silos offers to the visitors and researchers also the possibility to interact with its digital archives, in which the brand's historical memories are brought back to life thanks to a digital soul, where through the use of touchscreen tables, workstations and projection areas it is possible to access its cultural heritage. The archive includes one thousand outfits divided into various collections, images and videos documenting backstage life and catwalks, sketches, advertisements and excerpts from *Emporio Armani Magazine* (*Armani Silos Exhibition Space*, 2018).

Armani Silos also offers a website³⁵ in which it is possible to plan the visits, reserve tickets for visits and for consulting the digital archives, to read about exhibitions, initiatives, and the story of the museum. In addition to that, it is also active on two social media channels: Facebook³⁶ and Pinterest,³⁷ with respectively 26,380 and 526 followers (as of June 29, 2021).

1.3.7 Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris and Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech

In 2017, two museums have been established to present the works and the life of Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008) and the collections of the Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent Foundation: one in Paris at the historic headquarter of the Yves Saint Laurent fashion house, and the other one in Marrakech.

The Parisian Museum is located in the Hôtel Particulier at 5 avenue Marceau where Yves Saint Laurent spent almost thirty years of his life designing his collections from 1974 to 2002. Part of the 450 meters square building is occupied by the headquarter of the Fondation Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent (*Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris*, n.d.).

³⁵ www.armanisilos.com.

³⁶ www.facebook.com/armanisilos/.

³⁷ www.pinterest.it/armanisilos/.

The museum Yves Saint Laurent Paris is considered among the first museums in the city of Paris fully dedicated to the work of one of the twentieth century's greatest couturiers (*Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris*, n.d.).

The museum focuses on the couturier's creative genius, on the process of thinking and designing an haute couture collection, on the history of the twentieth century and the haute couture traditions that accompanied a way of life that no longer exists. It encompasses a rotation of retrospectives and displays temporary thematic exhibitions, offering a selection of approximately fifty haute couture designs throughout its spaces. To the main themes that shaped the couturier's life, the museum also presents two of Yves Saint Laurent's major creations: the Mondrian dresses (autumn–winter 1965) and the gowns realized in collaboration with the artist Claude Lallanne (autumn–winter 1969); it offers on its website also the presentation of the so-called online collection (*New Display for the Collections*, 2019).

Its present and past exhibitions include: *Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris* (2017–2018); *Yves Saint Laurent: Dreams of the Orient* (2018–2019); *Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris* (2019–2020); *Betty Catroux, Yves Saint Laurent* (2020–2021); *Yves Saint Laurent. Behind the Scenes of Haute Couture in Lyon* (2021) (*What's on*, n.d.).

The Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech Museum has been designed by the Studio KO. It comprises a 400-square-meter permanent exhibition space designed by Christophe Martin, a temporary exhibition space, a 150-seat auditorium, a bookstore, a terrace café, and a research library with over 6,000 volumes which attracts a broad range of visitors: local and foreign researchers, anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, museum and exhibition curators, artists, and students (Morris, 2017; *The museum*, n.d.).

From a collection point of view, the museum mainly focuses on essential work of Yves Saint Laurent such as the pea coat, the Mondrian dress, 'le smoking' and the safari jacket. It seeks to transmit YSL passion for Morocco and to present what mostly influenced the designer. Within the permanent exhibition, fifty pieces chosen from YSL collections are

displayed around themes dear to the designer such as Masculine-Feminine, Black, Africa and Morocco, Imaginary Voyages, Gardens and Art offering a different perspective of the couturier's work using garments, which regularly rotate to better conserve each piece and to constantly renovate the exhibition. *Jacques Majorelle's Morocco* (2017–2018); *The Sculptural Dresses of Nouredin Amir* (2017–2018); *Les Marocains by Leila Aloui* (2018–2019); *Garden Memory* (2019–2020); *Jacques Azema. A Poetic Adventure* (2019–2020); *Desert Design* (2019–2020); *Christo: Femmes 1962–1968* (2019–2020); *Brice Marden Morocco* (2019–2020); and *Bert Flynt* (2020–2021) are the exhibitions that have been or are displayed within the museum (*Exhibitions*, n.d.; Morris, 2017).

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The museum Yves Saint Laurent Paris is present on Facebook,³⁸ Instagram³⁹ and YouTube⁴⁰ with about 190,000 followers altogether. The Marrakech Museum⁴¹ as well as the Parisian⁴² one offer to their visitors a website. While the second one offers also an online collection, in the first case the webpage appears to be less elaborated. It is possible to get to know more about Yves Saint Laurent life, the story of the building and of the museum, the library, the auditorium, the foundation Jardin Majorelle, the exhibitions and about how to organize the visit. The museum appears to be active on the following social media Facebook,⁴³ Instagram⁴⁴ and Twitter⁴⁵ with in total almost 140,000 followers (as of June 29, 2021).

1.3.8 Musée Atelier Audemars Piguet

38 www.facebook.com/museeyslparis/.

39 www.instagram.com/museeyslparis/.

40 www.youtube.com/user/fondationpbysl.

41 www.museeyslmarakech.com.

42 museeyslparis.com.

43 www.facebook.com/myslmarrakech/.

44 www.instagram.com/myslmarrakech/.

45 twitter.com/myslmarrakech.

The Musée Atelier Audemars Piguet was inaugurated in 2020 in Le Brassus, home of the Audemars Piguet family, in order to plunge into the Swiss manufacturer's cultural universe past, present and future, by presenting two centuries of watchmaking history. The museum embodies the original historical house, established by Audemars Piguet's founders in 1875, with a new all-glass structure, made up of two spirals integrated into the existing landscape (Andrei, 2020, *The Architecture*, n.d.).

The museum offers collectors and auction houses a range of amenities and solutions including research, certification, as well as traditional restoration and preservation, *Grande Complication* and *Métier d'Art* workshops. As part of the manufacture's ongoing creative efforts, the museum provides an exhibition space to host some art works commissioned by Audemars Piguet, it displays also some of the manufacturer's watchmakers and artisans at work in their workshops. By integrating traditional ateliers at the centre of the museum, Audemars Piguet pays tribute to craftspeople who have given birth to the brand across 250 years of history (Andrei, 2020).

The museum showcases some 300 watches, encompassing pieces of miniaturization, technical complexity and avant-garde design and including iconic pieces belonging to Audemars Piguet's heritage. The museum showcases rare timepieces, such as the watch *Universelle* – the most complicated piece crafted by Audemars Piguet in 1899 – as well as a series of emblematic models including *Royal Oak*, *Royal Oak Offshore* and *Royal Oak Concept* (Besler, 2020).

Within the museum, it is possible to watch the exposition according to different types of watches such as *Chronograph Watches*, *Calendar Watches*, *Chiming Watches*, *Grandes Complications* or according to their period: *Belle Epoque*, *Art Deco*, *Postwar-boom Years*, *The 1970s*, *Late 20th Century*, *21st Century* (*Designing time*, n.d.; *Watches of exception*, n.d.).

The museum opened its doors in 2020, the same year in which UNESCO declared the craftsmanship of mechanical watchmaking and art mechanics an intangible cultural

heritage of mankind (Andrei, 2020; Markl, 2020). The inclusion within intangible UNESCO cultural heritage does not only refer to the craftsmanship needed to produce watchmaking objects designed to measure and indicate time (clocks and chronometers, pendulum clocks and watches), but also to animated paintings, art automata and mechanical androids, music boxes, sculptures and songbirds. Among the values that the practice of watch-making conveys, according to UNESCO, there are creativity, dexterity, good workmanship, patience, punctuality, perseverance, precision and the intangible aspect of time measurement. Apart from the philosophical and intangible dimension behind the inscription in the UNESCO intangible heritage list, there is also an economic function, which has impacted Swiss and French society: the watch production and watchmakers have also shaped the architecture, urban landscape of the regions involved and with their industries they contribute to the economic development of the involved countries (Markl, 2020). In fact, eleven years earlier, in 2009, UNESCO had already inscribed as World Heritage Site La Chaux-de-Fonds/Le Locle, Watchmaking Town Planning. According to UNESCO, its universal outstanding value can be synthesized as follows: “The watchmaking urban ensemble of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle demonstrates outstanding universal value as these twin manufacturing-towns constitute an exceptional example of organic urban ensembles entirely dedicated to a single industry. They have been constructed by and for watchmaking. They are the product of an extremely close symbiosis between socio-technical needs and responses provided by town planning choices. Watchmaking has given rise to a remarkable architectural typology in the built structure. Housing designed for home working is situated alongside owners’ houses, workshops, and more recent factories, in a homogeneous and rational urban fabric that is open to the outside. The two towns bear witness to the exceptional uninterrupted continuation of a living and world-renowned watchmaking tradition, which has succeeded in coping with the socio-technical and economic crises of the contemporary world” (*Cultural properties – La Chaux-de-Fonds/Le Locle, watch-making town*, 2009).

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The museum is also active online through a website, which offers visitors the opportunity to book activities that can be done in presence such as guided visits or workshops. In addition to that, it is possible to find on the website information about the museum, its surroundings, the architecture of the building, the exposed pieces and the ateliers.

The Musée Atelier Audemars Piguet has not dedicated social media accounts. From its website, the social media channels of the brand itself are linked. If we count them, it becomes the most active in terms of number of social media in which it is present considering the institutions presented in this section: Facebook⁴⁶, Instagram,⁴⁷ Pinterest,⁴⁸ Twitter,⁴⁹ YouTube⁵⁰ and Weibo⁵¹, with more than 4,400,000 followers in total.

1.3.9 Fashion in Museums and Exhibitions: An Overview of Their Digital Presence

As we have seen, all presented museums/institutions are active in the digital communication domain, even if at different degrees of involvement, and covering different social media channels. Such a variety could represent different approaches and philosophies when it comes to articulate the relationship between the physical and the digital, spanning from just providing essential info up to displaying digital exhibitions and offering booking services. Such differences might be also due to different budgets, to various maturity levels of their management, to copyright constraints, as well as to various connections and degrees of freedom between those institutions linked to a company and the company itself.

One can expect that the experience of lockdowns due to Covid19 will act as an accelerator in order to expand their online activities towards higher levels of interactivity, richer contents, and exploration of advanced features. All of them are also somehow active on

46 www.facebook.com/audemarspiguet/.

47 www.instagram.com/audemarspiguet/.

48 www.pinterest.pt/audemarspiguet/_created/.

49 twitter.com/audemarspiguet.

50 www.youtube.com/user/aptvofficial.

51 <https://weibo.com/3115261414>

social media, showing how their interactions with visitors, prospects and all interested persons can find on such channels a privileged field. Table 1 provides the number of followers/likes for each social media account.

While all above presented museums and exhibitions have been using several digital media in order to present themselves and make their collections somehow available, in recent years fully digital exhibitions and collections have been curated. That offers the possibility of crowd sourcing items that are physically distant and owned by different subjects, at the same time ensuring their (digital) conservation and accessibility to larger publics. Let us approach three cases in the next paragraph.

1.3.10 Digital Platforms

We can briefly present here two very large initiatives in the field – *the Europeana Fashion collection* and the Google *We Wear Culture* – as well as a recent initiative devoted to the Batik textile heritage: iWareBatik.

Table 1 Number of followers of museums' social media accounts as of June 29, 2021. The table is organized on the basis of the most liked Facebook page, which is the only social media used by all institutions.

Museum

The MET Museum and its Gala	1,958,630	3,883,562	852,173	4,302,304	271,000	–
Audemars Piguet	1,585,046	2,457,865	2,222	216,207	52,500	99,914
V&A Museum	709,368	1,607,294	121,700	1,373,072	204,000	–
Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris	112,507	77,928	–	–	633	–
Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech	105,328	32,114	–	901	–	–
Palais Galliera Musée Armani Silos	30,569	30,809	–	20,401	–	–
Cristobal Balenciaga	25,879		526	–	–	–
Museoa	17,972	16,604	–	6,106	Data n.a.	–
Museum Dior Granville	10,239	6,906	–	1,570	–	–

The project Europeana Fashion is a best practice network co-funded under an EU programme and initially composed by 22 partners from 12 European countries, which involved leading European institutions and collections in the fashion domain. The project was born in 2012 with the aim of providing access to over 700,000 digitized fashion pieces from Europe's leading museums, photographers and fashion archives, considering historical clothing and accessories, contemporary designs, catwalk photographs, drawings, sketches, posters, catalogues and videos to collectively showcase European fashion in a digital space and to digitally preserve a most valuable part of European Cultural Heritage (Europeana Fashion Project, n.d.; *Europeana Fashion*, n.d.).

Among the contents provided, there are contemporary autumn–winter, spring–summer collections from designers, as well as galleries and exhibitions such as *Clothes for the Ballroom*; *Les Coututiers*; *Textile Industry* and many more (*Europeana Fashion*, n.d.).

Thanks to its success, Europeana fashion led to the creation of the Europeana Fashion International Association, a non-profit organization established to bring together and

engage fashion institutions, both GLAM s – Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums – and creative industries, to valorize fashion heritage also online.

The association organizes special events every year, such as conferences and training workshops with the aim of enlarging competences and skills of its members on crucial topics such as the use of social media, the digitization and metadata standards for fashion contents and copyrights issues. It also offers support in order to help stakeholders to learn how to design and implement collection management systems for fashion archives (*Europeana Fashion, an enjoyable portal for everyone to explore!*, 2021).

Among its supporting members there are: Amsterdam Museum (NL), Archivio Emilio Pucci Firenze (IT), Fondazione Gianfranco Ferré Milano (IT), Les Art Decoratifs – Louvre Paris (FR), Missoni S.p.A Sumirago (IT), Salvatore Ferragamo S.p.A. Firenze (IT), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (DE) and Stockholm Universitet (SE) (*Europeana Fashion, an enjoyable portal for everyone to explore!*, 2021).

In 2017, Google has launched a global initiative called *We wear culture*, offering a virtual free access exhibition presenting 3,000 years of fashion (*We Wear Culture: 3.000 years of fashion in Google*, n.d.). More than 180 museums, fashion organizations, schools, archives, other institutions and NGO s from all over the world have collaborated with Google to explain through this virtual exhibition that fashion can be considered a part of culture, a form of art and the result of craftsmanship with a multifaceted impact. To do so, these institutions have teamed up to make available online more than 30,000 fashion pieces (*We Wear Culture: 3.000 years of fashion in Google*, n.d.).

With more than 450 exhibits, the website offers visitors the opportunity to explore and understand fashion through different lenses presenting pieces that go from the Silk Road and the Sari history to the British Punk. Moreover, it presents the most iconic couturiers, shoemakers, jewelers, tie-dyers and bag-makers such as Coco Chanel, Cristóbal Balenciaga, Oscar de la Renta, Salvatore Ferragamo, Yves Saint Laurent or Vivienne Westwood, which mastered their crafts through generations, turning design sketches and

tailoring patterns into pieces that people still wear (Lauterbach, 2017; *We Wear Culture: 3.000 years of fashion in Google*, n.d.).

We Wear Culture explores also sustainability issues, presenting ecological or recycled textiles and offering visitors food for thought on what is the real cost of fast fashion, on how technology is revolutionizing the way fashion is done or on ways to consume fashion respecting the planet (*We Wear Culture: 3.000 years of fashion in Google*, n.d.). It also offers a section dedicated to virtual reality films on YouTube, bringing to life the stories of iconic pieces (Lauterbach, 2017).

From a technological point of view, Google's technologies include virtual reality, 360-degree videos, street and high-resolution images that are used to preserve collections and to make them available to everyone everywhere. The zoom option offers the chance to get into ultra-high-resolution images made with Art Camera in order to observe craftsmanship details and unique pieces (Lauterbach, 2017; *We Wear Culture: 3.000 years of fashion in Google*, n.d.).

We Wear Culture is available online at g.co/wewearculture and through the Google Arts & Culture mobile app on iOS and Android. According to Andrew Bolton, MET curator "It's very difficult to show fashion on a permanent display in museums because of its fragility", therefore, online exhibitions such as the ones provided by Google *We Wear Culture* can allow a large part of collections to be virtually displayed without damaging the pieces and further broadening the access to fashion (Ward, 2017).

The above-mentioned UNESCO recognition of practices and traditions related to the artisan *savoir faire* of watchmakers is not the only fashion-related practice, which has been inscribed in the UNESCO intangible heritage: another example is the Indonesian Batik textile. The production, the techniques utilized, the symbolism and culture that surrounds Batik, whose hand-dyed cotton and silk garments permeate the everyday life of Indonesian people has been recognized as a major intangible cultural heritage. In fact, from the very beginning to the end of life, Indonesians experience Batik not only as a garment to wear

but also as a form of culture and as a form of communication. The technique is often handed down by Indonesian families from generation to generation and the Batik craftsmanship intertwines with Indonesian cultural identity and spiritual rituals, through the adoption of symbols, colors and designs with particular meanings. While in their infancy babies are carried in batik slings adorned with symbols of good luck, specific Batik varieties are utilized during weddings and at funerals as well, the dead are shrouded within batik textiles. A central role is played by Batik in further religious rituals, such as the ceremonial casting of royal Batik into a volcano. Furthermore, Batik textile is worn regularly in business and academic settings, as well as by public employees. Batik technique originated from the island of Java and it is realized either by drawing dots and lines of the resist with a tool called canting, or by printing the resist with a copper stamp named cap. The diversity of patterns reflects varied historical influences including Arabic calligraphy, European bouquets, Chinese phoenixes, Japanese cherry blossoms and Indian or Persian peacocks (*Cultural Selection: “Batik for the World”*, n.d.; *Indonesian Batik*, n.d.; Permatasari & Cantoni, 2019a).

To preserve Batik and its heritage, the inscription of this technique in the UNESCO intangible heritage has also been accompanied by an increased interest by museums and by the development of information and communication technologies aimed at further safeguarding such heritage (*Discover Indonesian Batik at These 5 Batik Museums*, 2020; Permatasari & Cantoni, 2019b; Permatasari et al., 2020).

Among the digital initiatives, we should present here iWare Batik, which stands for “I am aware of Batik”, “interactive software of Batik” and “I wear Batik”. Developed thanks to a collaboration among the Indonesian LPDP Fund, Sobat Budaya’s Indonesian Cultural Digital Library, and USI – Università della Svizzera italiana (Switzerland), iWareBatik is a digital platform – a website⁵² and a mobile app – designed to showcase and communicate cultural values and meanings of Batik. It aims to help international travelers and

⁵² www.iwarebatik.org.

Indonesian Batik stakeholders to look for the variety of Batik textiles, the philosophical meanings behind each motif, their place of origin and local producers. Moreover, the platform provides tourist information about the 34 Indonesian provinces and their Batik-related practices, while doing so, it seeks to raise awareness towards rural sustainable tourism and the preservation of UNESCO heritage properties within Indonesia (*Philosophy of iWareBatik*, n.d.). The mobile app features gamification dimensions, and offers an artificial intelligence powered service: the user can take a picture of a Batik motif, and the system provides its name, history, meaning, and place of origin.

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Two different but convergent paths have led us to explore the close connections between fashion and popular culture. While doing so, we already stressed how the digital transformation has deeply impacted all studied aspects. It is now time to look closer at digital media and/in fashion, and to explore how popular culture and intercultural issues play on such stage.

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8. Localization: Getting Meanings and Products across Borders⁵³

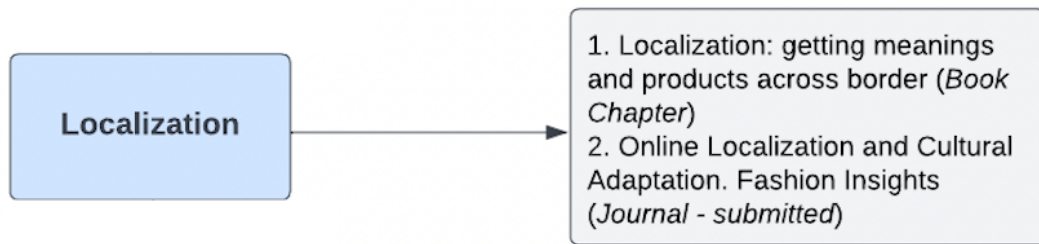


Fig. 10: PhD Thesis Design - Localization: Getting Meanings and Products across Borders

Despite until 1995 commercial activities were not allowed due to the regulations of the National Science Foundation in the USA, the interest in accessing the internet to create new forms of businesses was growing (Ariguzo et al., 2006). Through the years, the development of business transactions using eCommerce, which can be considered as the purchase or sale of goods or services over any kind of computer network, has emerged as one of fastest growing sectors of the US marketplace (Wigand, 2015; Willis, 2004), mainly due to the fact that ICT s and the internet have established themselves as a source of competitive advantage for those companies able to properly exploit their potentials. They provide a continuous access to information for all involved stakeholders in eCommerce: suppliers, world markets, and consumers, while providing a 24/7 communication platform.

⁵³This chapter is taken from the book *Digital Fashion Communication. An (Inter)cultural Perspective* published by Brill Research Perspectives in Popular Culture, Series: Brill Research Perspectives in Humanities and Social Sciences a peer-reviewed series. The book was submitted on 29 August 2021, double-blind reviewed and accepted on 28 February 2022, and published on 1 September 2022.

Noris, A., Cantoni, L. (2022a). Digital Fashion Communication. An (inter)cultural perspective. In M. Danesi (ed.), *Research Perspectives in Popular Culture*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill

Within such a digital context, the debate of “standardization versus adaptation (or localization)” has taken center stage in international business research (Yalcin et al., 2011); on the web, technology makes mass adaptation possible, while the forces of global integration support the use of a standardized web marketing and communication strategies (Sackmary and Scalia, 1998; Yalcin et al., 2011).

Standardization is defined in the literature as the strategy by which marketers select and operate within homogeneous global markets and in response offer standardized products and services using a standardized marketing mix (Mooij de 1998, Subhash, 1989; Yalcin et al., 2011). Those who support such a communication and marketing strategy believe that through globalization and through the development and provision of digital technologies globally, cultural distance can be minimized, leading to the convergence of national cultures into one homogeneous global culture. However, research stresses the complex nature of international and intercultural marketing and communication, and underlines the diversity in terms of physical environment, political and legal systems, cultures, product use conditions, and economic development (Singh et al., 2005; Yalcin et al., 2011). Furthermore, according to Yalcin et al. (2011), several researchers argue that due to the substantial differences between the markets that companies choose to approach, it is neither desirable nor feasible to achieve standardization of marketing and communication activities. Lim et al. (2004) argue that cultural differences influence Internet purchasing behavior despite the global reach of the web, and Singh and Pereira (2005) add that consumers prefer to shop and interact with sites designed specifically for them in their own language. Academic studies performed in the touristic field (Mele et al., 2015), for instance, reveal the importance and the best-practices put in act by practitioners to localize and culturally adapt contents and services on the web. Managers from destination marketing organizations invest on localization, assigning content production to experts from the reference markets and offering country-specific versions of their destination websites (Mele & Cantoni, 2017).

The above-mentioned type of technical and cultural adaptation of contents and services takes the name of “localization”. Localization, according to LISA (Localization Industry

Standards Association), can be considered therefore as “the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets” (Fry & Lommel, 2003: 13) or according to Mele et al. (2016) it can be considered as a “cultural translation”, which consists in the adaptation of different elements such as texts, images, videos, but also units of measure, sizes or calendars.

New markets have highlighted the need of commercialization of appropriate products and services, accompanied by a tailor-made communication strategy, which should take into account people’s cultural background, language and interests (Mele et al., 2015). Moreover, the spread of Covid19 pandemic has emphasized the key role of a properly designed eCommerce and online communication strategy localized according to audiences’ needs, to help companies survive closures and lockdowns imposed by local governments (Noris & Cantoni, 2021a).

When considering localization, while there is a consensus on its strategic value for eCommerce, some aspects related to it and to the way contents are communicated online are still under-researched. As an example, within the fashion environment, despite academics and practitioners recognize the importance of a properly designed localization strategy for fashion brands, localization is still scarcely researched, in particular when it comes to analyse how fashion companies should culturally adapt online contents to approach different consumers and markets (Noris et al., 2020b).

Within fashion the main studies on localization have been performed examining the offline retail environment, showing the importance of considering the so-called “global-local dilemma”, when fashion brands approach new markets such as the Chinese one, in which challenging trading conditions are present and costumers present low levels of brand awareness and loyalty, alongside the brands’ need to keep exclusivity and standardization of brand image across all the considered markets (Liu et al., 2014). Within the digital fashion environment, instead, still little research has been performed on the relevance of the localization/standardization issue, in particular when it comes to consider the localization of cultural elements. A first exploratory study on localization and cultural

adaptation strategies of fashion companies has been performed by Noris et al. (2020b). The research has taken into account four international fast fashion brands – Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo and Zara – and three of their country-related eCommerce webpages: the Australian, Italian and Russian ones. It has then presented which are the elements that are mostly localized both from a technical and from a cultural point of view. From the study, it has emerged that the considered sample of fast fashion companies tends on each of the three analyzed countries to consider technical localization elements that include calendars, seasonality, currencies, models and sizes, while it seems that they consider less the cultural values of the countries in their dedicated eCommerce webpages. Considering the following cultural values identified by Hofstede et al. (2010): individualism/collectivism, power distance, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance, which, depending on the score of each value, characterize and identify the cultural values of each of the country considered (Australia, Italy and Russian Federation), the study shows that the considered brands do not act

homogeneously when it comes to cultural adaptation of online contents, services, and products. Some companies seem to have considered in their eCommerce and online communication strategy aspects related to the individualism/collectivism value, others have considered values such as uncertainty avoidance or power distance, while none of them appears to have considered masculinity/femininity (Noris et al., 2020b).

Moreover, further studies are needed to expand and rethink the concept of localization: for fashion companies to localize does not simply mean to adapt their marketing and communication strategies from a geographical or national point of view in order to meet the needs of a specific target market, but it also means to take into account the different sub-cultures that make up our society and external factors such as for example the Covid19, which demonstrated the (in)adequacy of the communicative choices of fashion brands during the first pandemic wave that forced millions of people to live in lock-down and that led some brands to rethink their communication and marketing strategies to get closer to the needs of their audience (Noris et al., 2021a).

Although it seems quite evident that the fashion field, as well as many others, has started to recognize the importance of a properly designed and executed localization strategy, it appears to be still in a trial-and-error phase, which might bring in the future to practices that will better balance localization and standardization elements. If, in fact, from one side, the standardization of products, services, communication and cultural contents could be considered by fashion companies as a valid strategy to reinforce their brand identity also through the use of positive stereotypes, on the other side, that could be perceived by new and old markets as a lack of cultural sensitivity towards their own culture and interests. In recent years, some fashion stakeholders have slipped into considerable (inter)cultural communication crises. The following paragraph will help better understand such crises through the presentation and discussion of several cases.

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9. Online Localization and Cultural Adaptation. Fashion Insights⁵⁴

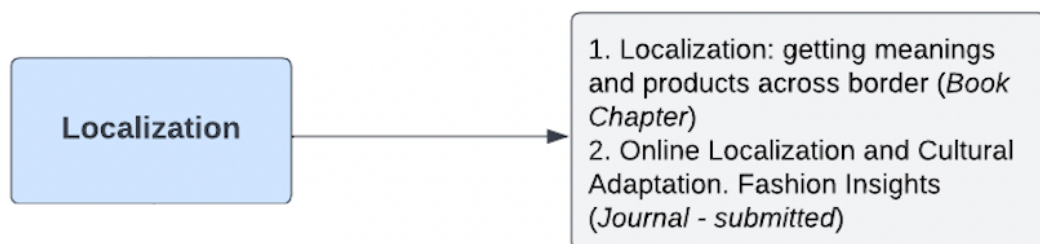


Fig. 10: PhD Thesis Design - Online Localization and Cultural Adaptation. Fashion Insights

Digital technologies have reduced the time needed to exchange information and have facilitated operational issues, allowing companies to reach the

⁵⁴ Noris, A., Kalbaska, N., Cantoni, L. (*in review*). Online Localization and Cultural Adaptation. Fashion Insights

farthest corners of the world with their products and marketing activities. In such an interconnected context, fashion has not remained exempt from digital transformation. A considerable part of website and social media contents are produced by this sector. Fashion companies have understood the importance of offering innovative products and of appropriately communicating their contents, adapting their marketing strategies to various countries. This marketing strategy, which can also be done at digital level, is called “localization” and consists in the adaptation of different elements (texts, images, videos, etc.) to interface with various markets. This paper, through a series of interviews with managers and executives, aims to understand what localization means for fashion brands, which impact Covid19 has had on localization and the brand-identity dilemma when it comes to adapting digital contents.

Keywords: Digital Fashion – International Marketing – Intercultural Communication - Localization

Introduction

The wide adoption of the internet has simplified the transmission of data and information and accelerated both general and industry-specific aspects of globalisation, and it has also accelerated interconnections, helping people to interact with the four corners of the world, going beyond political and geographical boundaries (Magu, 2015).

Moreover, the constant increase in the number of internet users worldwide as well as the recent spread of the Covid19 pandemic that has forced millions of people into isolation have made the internet ‘more local’ (Noris et al., 2020, Noris & Cantoni, 2021a).

In such an interconnected context, ICTs and the internet have emerged as a source of competitive advantage for those companies able to adequately exploit their potential, allowing seamless access to information by all the involved stakeholders: suppliers, global markets and consumers, while providing a 24/7 communication platform (Noris & Cantoni, 2022).

Within this digital context, the debate concerning firms managerial choices regarding “standardisation versus adaptation (or localization)” strategies has taken a central stage in international business research (Vrontis, 2003; Yalcin et al., 2011). On the one hand, proponents of standardisation, which is defined as the strategy by which marketers select and operate within homogeneous global markets and in response offer standardised products and services using a standardised marketing mix and business strategy (Douglas, 1986; Jain 1989; Mooij 1998; Singh, 2011), believe that the development of new technologies and the use of the web make mass content adaptation possible. Moreover, they claim that the forces of global integration, justify the use of a largely standardised web marketing and communication strategies (Sackmary and Scalia, 1998; Yalcin et al., 2011). Those who support such a communication and marketing strategy believe that through globalisation and through the development and provision of digital technologies globally, cultural distance can be minimised, leading to the convergence of national cultures into a homogeneous global culture (Yalcin et al., 2011).

On the other hand, academic research on localization shows the complexity of the nature of international and intercultural marketing and communication. It emphasises diversity in terms of the physical environment, political and legal systems, cultures, conditions of product use and economic development (Singh et al., 2005; Yalcin et al., 2011). Several researchers argue that due to the substantial differences between the markets in which companies choose to operate, it is neither desirable nor feasible to achieve standardisation of marketing and communication activities (Yalcin et al., 2011). Finally, as stated by Steenkamp (2019) a third strand of research advocates hybridization, or glocalization, and it refers to the desire to embrace elements of global culture and integrate them into a local culture (Halliburton & Ziegfeld, 2009). Proponents of this approach include Appadurai (1996) and Sandikci and Ger (2002), who argue respectively that global cultural forces tend to indigenize and that “modernization” for consumers does not mean assimilation of global culture. Also, Figueredo (2018) by reviewing Darling-wolf & Arbor (2014) and Schmidt-Devlin et al. (2022) presents the global-local dynamics as mutually constitutive elements and claims that overall global stakeholders are trying to become glocal by building and nurturing local authenticity.

The fashion industry has also not been exempt from the standardisation versus localization debate although only few aspects regarding the importance of localization have emerged from previous studies. Examples are studies carried out by Liu et al. (2014) and Xie et al. (2015) on the standardization/localization dilemma of retail

stores, in which it emerged the importance of balancing the ‘global-local dilemma’ to foreign retailers in China; or the study carried out by Noris et al. (2020) on localization strategies of fast fashion companies on eCommerce, which has demonstrated that fashion brands, even when belonging to the same sector, in this case “fast fashion”, seem not to provide a homogeneous response to the need of localization. Further studies are therefore needed to better understand what localization means for fashion companies and how this concept is evolving.

In this direction, this study, through 17 semi-structured interviews with managers active in the fashion world and through a grounded theory, aims to further investigate which localization elements related to online marketing and communication are considered to be of paramount importance by fashion companies, what is the definition of localization that sums up the considered key elements, and what are the managerial challenges that companies face in balancing an adequate localization with the need to offer their audience a strong brand identity. In addition, this study also focuses on whether and how the Covid19 pandemic has actually impacted localization practices. To carry out the present research, managers during the interviews have been asked to answer a series of questions related to social media and eCommerce localization practices and to provide a definition of localization according to their expertise and understanding of the issue.

Literature Review

Hall (1976) points out that culture has three main characteristics: it is not innate in the individual but must be learned; the different aspects that characterize a culture are interconnected: therefore, when someone touches a certain cultural element, the rest connected to it will be affected; it is shared, allowing to define the boundaries between different groups.

By creating and sharing cultural values, individuals and organizations create communication practices. Among the goals of intercultural and cross-cultural communication research, which began in the 1970s, is precisely to foster communication practices between different cultures. Intercultural communication refers to the study of all aspects of communication and culture, including cross-cultural communication, which can be considered a branch of intercultural communication whose aim is to compare communication across cultures (Gudykunst, 2003).

In such a complex context, fashion as well intertwines significantly with culture and communication: the different perspectives into which we divide the English word culture (which comes from the Latin verb *colere* "to care", "look after") as cultivating the natural/physical earth, caring for ourselves and other human beings and connecting with God (Mele et al., 2015; Noris & Cantoni, 2022), can also be applied to the world of fashion: we use natural materials to produce clothes and cosmetics or we create new artificial ones; we dress according to culturally accepted/promoted standards; we use ad-hoc clothes and cosmetics to communicate during major events in human life – weddings, religious ceremonies, vacations, etc.

(Kalbaska et al., 2018). According to Hofstede et al. (2010), the way people dress has a symbolic value and should be considered as one of the outer layers of every culture, since together with words, gestures, images or objects it carries a special meaning, which is only recognizable by those who share the same culture.

Following this perspective, fashion can be fully considered also as a matter of communication: the way we dress is something that goes beyond functional needs. Wearing clothes helps people communicate who they are and/or who they would like to be; thanks to fashion and the way people dress, they have the opportunity to relate with others or with different communities (Kalbaska et al., 2018) sharing (or not) particular meanings of different cultures.

If, as abovementioned, digitalization and online communication have shortened distances among communities and much has been done from the technological point of view with the implementation of increasingly innovative devices and software that allow people to overcome spatial barriers, in fact, cultural or linguistic barriers often remain (Hagberg & Kjellberg, 2020; Noris et al., 2020; Noris & Cantoni, 2021b). This is where research related to localization comes in.

Localization is defined as “the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets” (Fry & Lommel, 2003:13). Pym further explains localization as “adapting features to suit a particular ‘locale’, which is itself understood as a market segment defined by criteria including language, currency, and perhaps education level or income bracket, depending on the nature of the

communication” (2012:3), while Mele defines it as a “cultural translation” (Mele et al., 2016). Yalcin et al. (2011) and Lim et al. (2004) also argue that cultural differences influence internet shopping behavior despite the global reach of the web, and Singh and Pereira (2005) add that consumers prefer to shop and interact with sites designed specifically for them in their local language. Academic studies conducted in the tourism field by (Mele et al., 2015; Mele & Cantoni, 2017), for example, reveal the importance and best practices implemented by professionals to localize and culturally adapt content and services on the web. Managers in destination marketing organizations invest in localization by assigning content production to experts in different target markets and offering country-specific versions of the destination website (Mele & Cantoni, 2017).

While there is a consensus on the use of localization and cultural adaptation strategies for the sales and marketing industry both online and offline (Han & Kim, 2003; Kimura & Belk, 2005; Singh et al., 2005) or in the tourism domain (Mele et al., 2015), this topic has not been extensively studied, when referring to the localization and cultural adaptation of online content of fashion companies (Noris et al., 2020).

The topic of localization when it comes to fashion has mainly been addressed in relation to the offline retail environment (Bai et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2014, Xie et al., 2015), or in relation to cultural differences within the management of textile and apparel companies (Angelova, 2016). Only recently the pervasiveness and relevance of the localization/standardization issue has started to be considered within the digital

communication research field. For instance, when considering the fashion eCommerce environment, the study of Noris et al. (2020) presents through a content analysis which are the elements that the selected sample of fast fashion companies (Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo and Zara) localize. From the study it emerges that these companies tend to localize mainly technical aspects (i.e., sizes, colors, seasonality, currency, payment methods, calendars, etc.). According to the study, in fact, they seem not to consider cultural values of a certain country when it comes to localization practices, since they prefer to localize mainly aspects whose adaptation might further simplify the purchasing experience of a customer on the eCommerce. Another localization-related aspect that has only recently started to be taken into account in research are communication crises. As shown by the studies of Cantoni & Noris (2021b; 2022) a superficial or incorrect online localization strategy can lead fashion brands (but not only) to communication crises that can become global, due to the dissemination of contents via digital media. Examples are the case of the director of Vogue Brasil accused of having organized a colonial-themed birthday party, the case of Gucci with the Sikh community, the case of Dolce & Gabbana with China, the case of Uniqlo with South Korea etc. (Noris & Cantoni, 2022). All these examples show how crises not infrequently occur due to wrong or non-existent localization choices put in place by fashion stakeholders.

Moreover, as stated by Singh et al. (2003), despite the importance given to localization by marketers, there is still a lack of managerial skills and knowledge to

adapt online content to different consumers (Nobile et al., 2021). This study aims therefore to address the research gap in the fashion field by exploring, for the first time, how localization managers define the concept of localization, which aspects should be (or not) localized in the digital environment according to their experience, and which role is played by culture when referring to localization.

Methodology

This research was carried out by involving 17 managers and executives (10 female and 7 male), who work in fashion companies, mainly in the luxury, jewelry, and sports sectors, and whose headquarters are located in Italy, Spain, Switzerland, UK and United States.

First of all, as a first selection criteria, we proceeded to choose fashion companies that made available at least 3 languages on their eCommerce website and that therefore deal with linguistic localization, and we kept into account companies which have at least an account on Instagram. Secondly, through LinkedIn or via e-mail, we contacted employees/managers who are involved in localization processes and work in the field of communication/marketing/digitalization to ask for an interview. 120 managers have been contacted via LinkedIn. 17 accepted to be interviewed, due to stringent non-disclosure agreements several managers could not accept to be interviewed.

The roles of the employees interviewed are as follows:

Code	Role	Sector
Exp.1	Consumer Direct Marketing Specialist	Sport
Exp.2	Corporate Press Office	Luxury Clothing
Exp.3	Digital Marketing Strategist	Luxury Clothing
Exp.4	Digital Marketing Strategist	Fast Fashion
Exp.5	Digital Marketplace Manager	Luxury Clothing
Exp.6	Director of Buying and Planning	Luxury Clothing
Exp.7	Global Brand Communication Manager	Watches
Exp.8	Global Digital PR Coordinator	Luxury Clothing
Exp.9	Global Digital Director	Sport
Exp.10	Global Retail Excellence Manager	Jewelry
Exp.11	Head of Global Marketing	Luxury Shoes
Exp.12	Head of Global Social Media	Luxury Shoes
Exp.13	Head of Retail Innovation	Luxury Clothing
Exp.14	Paid Media Executive	Fast Fashion
Exp.15	Senior Customer Experience Designer	Sport
Exp.16	Senior eCommerce Manager	Luxury
Exp.17	Senior Marketing Manager	Denim

Table 1. Interviewees data

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were done in order to allow the interviewees to deal with the topic in a broad way and taking into account the different company sectors (apparel, jewelry, luxury, shoes, sports) which might deal with the

topic of localization in different ways. Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to the fact that the goal of this research is to better understand the uncharted territory of localization with unknown but potential momentous issues, in order to spot useful leads and pursue them (Adams, 2015).

Interviews were conducted from October 22, 2020, through May 09, 2022, online, via Microsoft Teams/Zoom. If agreed, the interviews were recorded and transcribed, if not, notes were taken. All interviewees' companies were anonymized for privacy concerns and each interview lasted from 20 minutes up to an hour. For some companies more than one manager has been interviewed. Only managers and executives working for monobrand companies or for brand corporations have been considered for the interviews, and only in one occasion a manager, who also worked for a fashion marketplace compared the two experiences.

Four main questions were asked to the interviewees:

1. What does localization mean from an eCommerce perspective?
2. What does localization mean from a social media perspective?
3. How do you understand the concept of localization?
4. How has Covid impacted your localization strategy?

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was chosen to analyze data. It was chosen because the goal of this research is to provide a theory regarding the concept

of localization in fashion and how the broad definition of localization has evolved over time. Grounded theory requires the researcher to let the theory emerge from the data. The following three procedures for analysis were followed: coding, memoing and sorting. The coding procedure consisted of noting the main concepts and labelling them. Memoing, on the other hand, was the phase of writing short notes connecting the aspects discussed in the individual interviews. Finally, the sorting process consisted in the phase of reading and re-reading the concepts to identify the categories and their interrelationships, until saturation was achieved (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013).

On the one hand, this type of analysis made it possible to identify the main aspects that characterize localization in fashion when it comes to eCommerce, social media and during periods of crisis such as the Covid19 pandemic; on the other hand, it made possible to provide a new, more inclusive and up-to-date definition of localization from an industry's perspective.

In the following paragraphs we will refer to the interviewed managers by mentioning them through the above-mentioned code and always using feminine pronouns she/her to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

Results

The analysis of the interviews led to the identification of a series of recurring topics presented by the managers working for the companies under consideration. Results are

presented by aggregating the responses given by managers to the four main questions. No direct quotes from the interviews have been reported due to the fact that several interviews occurred in Italian and literal translation should have been used. Also, it should be noted that the responses do not take into account the academic differences that occur among terms such as websites, webpages, and eCommerce but they are used as indicated by managers and executives during their interviews.

1. What does localization mean from an eCommerce perspective?

For the interviewed managers, localizing from an eCommerce perspective means considering the following three main categories: space, time, person. Each of these three categories has subcategories. The category space contains the following subcategories: geographical localization, languages, methods of payment and currency, models. The category time contains the following subcategories: calendars and festivities, and seasonality. Finally, the category named person contains products and size.

The subcategories are presented from the most generic to the most specific.

Space

As for the space category, it represents the localization of eCommerce platforms from a spatial viewpoint, so it primarily takes into consideration the geographic area in which the target market is located, the language(s) spoken, the currency and payment methods preferred in that specific area, and the phenotype of the model(s).

Geographical localization: interviews with managers have shown that the division of localization by geographical areas is not univocal among the various brands. The management of localization strategies is divided mainly by considering the following geographical macro-areas: North America (in which sometimes the Central America area is also included), South America, Europe or EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa) and Asia. Within these macro-areas the majority of managers have declared to follow ad-hoc localization strategies at least for their most important markets.

Some interviewees also stated that they manage the localization strategy for certain Asian countries individually: China, for example, is treated individually by some brands because, according to Exp13, Chinese customers are looking for a different customer experience, have a different purchasing behavior and are used to high standards of connection speed. China is a very digitized country and often if a brand is not so strong it needs to have local e-tailer partners in order to navigate the online market more easily. In addition, there are also complexities related to privacy issues and the opening or closing of certain systems and technology solutions. South Korea and Japan are also sometimes considered individually in terms of localization strategies due to different attitudes to purchasing by potential customers and to sociocultural complexities.

Some interviewees, moreover, have stated that they use localization strategies taking into account not only the aforementioned geographic macro-areas or individual countries but individual cities as well. Exp.4 explained that for both physical stores and eCommerce pages, her fast fashion group is able to analyze data and check which are the items that are best sellers in certain areas or cities. Exp.1 and Exp.17 have explained that some of their digital campaigns are created not only for specific countries but also for specific cities, usually for metropolises like London or Berlin. Exp.5 explained that they adopt different strategies. For example, in the UAE they rely on local partners to sell their products while in another non-EU country they chose to create a joint venture with local investors and leave them more autonomy, whereas in other countries where they want to test the market interest, they rely on marketplaces like Zalando and if the interest increases, they open stores and their own eCommerce webpage. In the USA they have chosen an even different strategy, being present only via eCommerce and not with physical stores.

Languages: With regard to the theme of eCommerce language localization, an important issue is the issue of costs. Managers often have limited budgets for the localization of websites, so it is important for them to decide whether it is worthwhile to translate a site into a particular language not only due to implementation costs, but also due maintenance costs. For Exp.4, working in fast fashion, it is essential to localize the language for the main markets. In the

countries in which the brand has less revenues they tend to keep English as main language and add local languages only once the market is more established. For the Spanish market, one of their core markets, the brand offers four different varieties of Spanish within the eCommerce. Overall, according to sport brand managers, whether working in apparel or footwear, adapting the language of eCommerce to different markets is crucial.

Exp.15 stated that for sport brands it is crucial to make the consumer understand the type of material of each product, so in her team she organizes meetings between the sales team and the product developers' team in order to better understand the used materials and to be even more consistent. Exp.1 stated how important is for them to have appropriate wording; going towards this direction her company has incorporated translation agencies and uses copywriters to propose optimal descriptions on their eCommerce. According to her and to Exp.15, offering a wide variety of different languages on their eCommerce does not necessarily mean providing an "appropriate translation" in which materials, products and contents are properly described. Each webpage and its related language must be regularly curated and updated.

As per the luxury brands, Exp.2 and Exp.13 stated that they offer eCommerce sites in the languages of every country in which they sell their products. Exp.2 and Exp.13 explained that for their companies, although it is clear that there is a cost issue, it is still essential to approach a "specific

geography” with their local language to avoid creating a negative perception of the brand. Exp.3 and Exp.16 also from luxury brands said they offer local languages only for their core markets and use English for the others.

As far as language is concerned, there are two crucial aspects to consider: first, it is crucial to take into account the linguistic complexity of some countries compared to others. In Switzerland and Belgium, it is important to offer the eCommerce version in all the national languages or, if not possible, in English; in Scandinavian countries where English is widely spoken and understood, it may not be necessary to translate the eCommerce into the local languages. Secondly, another language-related issue is the content layout: for Arabic-speaking countries the website display is different and therefore when localizing it is important to consider the possible UX problems and involved costs. As above-mentioned, the implementation and maintenance costs of the translated webpages cannot be overlooked by managers every time they decide to localize.

Methods of payment and currency: as far as methods of payment are concerned, it can be said that all the brands try to adapt the possibility of paying in the currency of the country they approach, not only offline but also on eCommerce, if economically convenient. Some managers have also stated that they try to adapt payment methods on the basis of the purchasing habits of their consumers. Exp.1, for example, stated that her brand allows customers in

countries such as Italy and Spain to pay cash for goods purchased on eCommerce, while other managers stated that in some countries, they allow payments to be made in installments. Managers also explained the importance of giving customers the possibility of using more local payment methods such as Klarna in Germany, Ideal in the Netherlands, Paypal in Italy, Alipay in China, etc.

Models: as far as the choice of models to present products on eCommerce is concerned, the choice of brands seems to be rather uniform. The tendency is to propose models of different nationalities regardless of the various markets they approach, to propose an increasingly multicultural image of the brand. This aspect is due to globalization and to the expansion of brands towards the East, towards China in particular and also to the Black Lives Matter movement. For Exp.16, the choice of models appears to be more of a stylistic issue than a communicative one. Models are chosen by the style department based on the best fit with the clothes proposed in the campaign. Exp.4 of the fast fashion brand interviewed stated that although they have found that in countries such as Mexico consumers tend to appreciate more models of Caucasian origin, their choice is to propose models of different ethnicities anyway, not adapting them to the possible preferences of the various markets. Exp.9 stated that in some Asian countries it would be more beneficial to use local “phenotypes” as

models in order to have a more effective communication strategy on eCommerce.

Time

As for the time category, it represents the localization of eCommerce platforms at the time level and takes into consideration firstly the localization of activities according to the seasons and secondly, according to festivities and calendars used in specific geographical areas.

Seasonality: with regard to the issue of product seasonality, most of the luxury apparel managers (Exp.2, 3, 8, 13, 16) explained that their tendency is to not offer different products based on the countries in which they are present with eCommerce. Although northern and southern hemisphere have inverted seasons, the range of products remains the same. According to Exp.3 and Exp.16, only a few “top” customers have access to personalized products based on the seasons.

Shoe brand managers, both from luxury and sport industry, as well as sports brand managers in general, on the other hand, stated that they lean towards localization. Exp.11 and Exp.12 stated that they localize their products based on latitude and temperature. In the Middle East, for example, no boots or rainboots are offered on eCommerce given the very high temperatures. Exp.4, working for fast fashion, explained that in her case products are not

adapted according to seasonality of each continent. Thanks to artificial intelligence systems the brand is able to recommend to each customer on the country related webpage the products that are more in line and suitable for the seasonality of the country considered. Exp.17 of the denim company stated instead that for her company is strategic to localize the products on the eCommerce according to the season.

Calendars and festivities: Interviewees stressed the importance of localizing holidays and calendars, especially in relation to specific markets. Although all brands follow a main calendar that guides marketing and communication choices, some managers explained that for example in China and in the Middle East in terms of eCommerce it is very important to take into account the customs and festivities of the above-mentioned areas. Managers use local marketing activations for the different key consumption periods: the elements that tend to be localized based on calendars and festivities are the style of communication, sales and promotions and sometimes even products.

As far as China is concerned, some brands, for example, offer dedicated capsule collections on their eCommerce or update the style of the Chinese website to celebrate festivities such as the Chinese New Year, the Single Day, Chinese Valentine's Day, etc. Exp.7, who works for a watch brand reported that in Japan, they are also used to advertising pair of watches since it is a local custom to buy them for weddings. In the Middle East, on the other hand,

Ramadan and its conclusion are also taken into consideration by some brands by offering products, promotions, and ad-hoc communication and marketing strategies for that specific period. Some brands choose instead to use a more “politically correct” strategy and avoid talking about festivities such as Christmas and choose to use terms such as “holidays” to communicate with their customers. Also brands that are present through local intermediary e-tailers tend to adapt holidays and calendars based on different cultures.

Exp.4 stated that they localize festivities and calendars only for the most important markets, while for others they prefer to follow the main calendar provided by the headquarter. For example, among their most important markets is Mexico, where they tend not to offer discounts for Black Friday as it is not a day felt by customers, but they do offer discounts on their eCommerce during the Cinco de Mayo, a festivity that commemorates the anniversary of Mexico’s victory over the French Empire in 1862. Exp.17 of the denim brand interviewed said that with regard to sales in the US they implement much more aggressive communication strategies when it comes to discount periods, while in Europe the strategy is a bit softer. The American strategy is much more “promotion-oriented”, and “discount and communication are pushier, if compared to Europe”. Finally, Exp.14 stressed the importance for her brand to localize sales and their percentage according to the period of sale of each country.

Person

As for the category person, it represents the localization of eCommerce platforms according to two subcategories: the taste in terms of product trends in a certain area and the size both in terms of different body shapes and in terms of textual description.

Products: As far as the type of products sold on eCommerce is concerned, there is no uniformity in the managerial choices of the brands interviewed.

Most of the brands working for luxury apparel stated that they generally maintain the same products for all markets. What can be sometimes changed is the display of products on the homepages of the various countries based on the products that are of most interest to consumers in these countries. A particular case is that of the Exp.5's company. Exp.5 stated that concerning products they tend to localize their eCommerce webpages: in Germany for example more informal products are shown while in UAE and Russia more formal garments are presented. Moreover, she stated that for specific countries also the stocks of clothes are different: For the EU area the different countries have mainly the same warehouse, but in countries where they operate for example as a Joint Venture or through franchises the selection of garments is different and also their presentation on the eCommerce. Another aspect mentioned by Exp.5 related to the product is the pricing of items, which varies depending on the geographical area. As for the jewelry brand considered, Exp.10 stated that the

assortment changes across countries, as does the merchandise. In some countries where the eCommerce has more weight some best sellers are sold only online and no longer in stores. As for brands selling both luxury and sports shoes, the trend is to localize. Exp.1 stated that her company also localizes the choice of materials. For example, in the Middle East her company does not sell shoes made from pigskin.

Exp.17 working for a denim company stated instead that their product strategy is to maintain a part of the global collection to try to make the brand univocal, but then local variations are proposed depending on the market, an example is the choice to propose in the Benelux products with paillettes, since consumers tend to appreciate them more than elsewhere.

Size: In relation to the communication of sizes on eCommerce, it can be said that also in this case there is no uniformity. Some brands try to adapt the size formats according to the customs of the various countries, using localization specialists who, for example, adapt the sizes to the different UK/US formats. Other brands propose conversion tables on their eCommerce, in the case of Exp.4, she stated that although for the moment they are using conversion tables, the size issue is very important, and her brand is working on it. Other brands do not adapt the communication of sizes, a particular case is the denim brand since they use the international denim standard.

Another aspect that has emerged related to sizes is the fact that sometimes the “size wording” remains the same on all eCommerce pages and what can change is the number of products in the stocks of each country, based on the physical conformation and on the fitting of consumers purchasing from different countries.

In conclusion, there are other issues mentioned by managers to consider when talking about localization and eCommerce: some brands offer different services on their eCommerce pages for the countries they interface with. Exp.10 of a jewelry brand stated that they offer different services for different countries based on the revenue generated from eCommerce. For example, in the U.S., a stock of products has been created specifically for eCommerce that physical stores can also draw on. In other countries where their eCommerce is less developed, it is the stores themselves that do the packaging, invoicing and part of the shipping for online customers. Another localized service relates to the possibility of booking appointments online to make videocalls with sale assistants who can guide potential customers in their purchase, whether in store or online.

Exp.6 who worked for a large e-retailer and also for a fashion luxury brand stated that the fashion marketplace had a much stronger online localization strategy than the monobrand company she worked for. For example, in the marketplace, although they had common goals for all the countries in which they were selling products, in particular in terms of KPIs, some of their hundreds of brands were only sold in specific

countries. Moreover, in the marketplace the homepage of the different countries showed different products depending on the geographical area in which the customer was, as well as the advertising campaigns: in Italy where customers tend to buy in small stores one of the focus of their campaigns was showing the ease of buying online and possibly making returns; in Germany instead, the push on returns was avoided, given the very high rate of returns that companies have to face. In general, in the marketplace the trend was to hire native speakers and an international workforce in the Headquarter in order to better understand the various consumer behaviors and use the language in the most appropriate way to engage with consumers, avoiding simple translations and understanding the psychology of each country.

2. What does localization mean from a social media perspective?

Concerning the second research question, it can be said that the interviewed managers provided a more uniform response. The trend on social media is to use a single account per social media and to localize across platforms. Although some brands still have a segmentation of their social media profiles according to countries, one manager, who reported her brand having multiple Instagram accounts for each country, stated that she would like to change the strategy since, according to her, having multiple accounts country-related could be a waste of followers and energy while being expensive.

In general, the goal of each brand is to be consistent with brand positioning and brand image no matter which market they are dealing with. The mainly used western platforms are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, sometimes Pinterest and YouTube, while

TikTok (The Chinese Douyin) is gaining ground. There is also a growing use of WhatsApp Business to communicate promotions and local initiatives to customers. Some brands have stated that they have active separate Instagram profiles only for certain nations such as, for example, Japan, which has different policies.

As far as the Russian Federation is concerned, before the beginning of the western sanctions after the start of the “special military operation” in Ukraine also VKontakte and sometimes Odnoklassniki were regularly used, in Asia and in particular in China instead Douyin, Wechat, Weibo, Little Red Book, Tik Tok, Tmall are used, while in Korea Kakao is extensively used. Exp.1 stated that for the Chinese market they often use agencies to create contents. The goal is to avoid cultural misunderstandings and become more effective in their communication strategy.

Exp.1 and Exp.15, who work in sports brands, have stated that they localize platforms also on the basis of the type of activity, for example Exp. 15 explained that her American multi-brand company offers on Instagram different accounts for various types of sports such as climbing, football, skiing, surfing etc.; Exp. 1, working for a US sport company, stated that her company has opened Instagram pages dedicated to large cities. The intent is to approach different communities and specially to meet the needs of subcultures that are increasingly present in big metropolises.

What is localized on social media is more at the level of paid campaigns, based on analytics and algorithm suggestions, brands suggest certain products rather than others to their potential customers. Another aspect that tends to be localized is

influencers: usually brands propose global ambassadors on their social platforms but then provide their products to more local influencers, who advertise them directly on their channels by performing local activations.

As far as the choice of being present (or not) on social media is concerned, three main aspects emerged during the interview: the effort needed, the investments required and the importance of planning. If on the one hand it is important to be present, on the other hand, it is equally important to be present only if you are able to provide the appropriate contents. The second aspect that emerged relates to the strategy, which according to Exp.1 must not depend on the channel but rather on insight.

Finally, the third and last topic is related to big brands, for them social campaigns are mostly managed by the headquarters and then the various teams located in different countries decide if the content of a given campaign is suitable for their market or if it should be modified or simply ignored because it is not appropriate or of little interest.

3. How do you understand the concept of localization?

The managers during the interviews were asked to provide a definition of localization and which characteristics determine a fruitful and successful localization strategy. Although the term localization is widely known among academics working in the marketing and communication field, during the interviews it has become clear that most of the interviewed do not use this term to refer to the adaptation strategy of contents and elements within the fashion digital environment. They broadly include it

within their marketing and communication strategies and therefore most of the them were not able to offer a specific definition of localization through their own words. The present answer considers therefore, the “ingredients” that were mentioned by each manager to define their localization strategy and tries to provide an overview of the concept of localization for the fashion domain.

When discussing localization both tangible and intangible aspects of the localization process should be considered. Among the tangible aspects there are: localization costs, omnichannel strategies and the importance to hire and have the right people. Intangible aspects include: inclusivity, image consistency, misunderstandings and crisis communication:

Tangible elements of localization

Costs: A crucial issue when it comes to localization is cost. It is fundamental for brands to balance the costs and benefits of localization. The brands’ intent must be to balance between the audience those brands are trying to target when it comes to localization, to have the right investments to the right markets, to provide proportionate investments to the markets that provide higher revenues, to be able to get the highest return on investment. It is important to understand that localization doesn't simply mean implementing a language in an eCommerce page or a channel in a platform, but it also means working on it on a regular basis, so all maintenance costs must be carefully considered in relation to the benefits. One aspect that emerged from the interviews regarding

the importance of localization and costs is the issue of reduced returns when it comes to online selling. According to many of the managers interviewed, Germany is one of the countries with the highest rate of product returns and this is highly dependent on consumer behavior, so it is crucial for brands to understand the reasons for the high rate of returns and possibly re-evaluate aspects related to translations and implementation and maintenance of digital services.

Omnichannel: For fashion brands it is important to reconcile the localization implemented in physical stores with that of eCommerce. The focus is on understanding customer behavior, knowing how to manage communication across different media (online and offline) and using all the data that can be collected as guidelines. According to Exp.13 the topic of omnichannel is even more important when it comes to luxury brands because having a good omnichannel strategy allows to reduce the experiential gap between in-store and online experience. On eCommerce the customer perceives less the difference between the eCommerce experience of a luxury store and a fast fashion one, while the difference in physical stores is much greater, therefore all channels must talk to each other to strengthen the experience at 360 degrees. In this sense, a key aspect is to train the sales force and help them in the digitization process: the sales force represents the brand and acts as its ambassador; therefore, it is crucial for brands to create an even stronger

customer-seller bond through digital channels such as WhatsApp Business, digital store visits, etc. Exp.5 mentioned for example that in the omnichannel perspective, the brand she works for allows the different eCommerce pages to take clothes from warehouses not only of the eCommerce itself but also from the warehouses of all the owned stores around the world and allows to ship up to four products from four different stores (sometimes even located in different countries) within the same order. In addition, all their owned and franchised stores are equipped with tablets and sellers can sell from the tablet and receive incentives in doing so.

Right people: During the interviews the importance of having the right people to implement localization processes emerged. People sensitive to different cultures are often not enough, sometimes it is necessary to have native speakers, aware of peculiar intercultural aspects. Cross skilling and up skilling in addition seems to have become essential. Other aspects to consider are the possibility of having copywriters who can work alongside translators, and the importance to train the retail sales force towards digitalization.

Having the right people also reduces the problems related to control: a manager of a global company does not have the physical or cultural ability to control every single piece of content that is published, so it is essential to choose the right people and train the team to think like a customer and provide them the possibility to test their hypotheses.

Intangible elements of localization

Inclusivity: Another aspect that emerged when talking about localization is inclusivity. It is no longer enough for fashion brands to take national cultures into account when they choose to localize. The idea of having “one style fits all” which was the approach used during the globalization boom has proven to be unrealistic. Fashion managers have declared the importance of having local teams to intercept consumer needs on a smaller scale, in order not only to catch the attention of national cultures but also meet specific subcultures. Movements like Black Lives Matter have allowed brands to think further about how to speak to their customers and to communicate who they are and pushed them to learn to adapt the way they talk to their customers across the globe.

Cultural adaptation and localization can be seen in the choice of brands to use models from all over the world for their shoots or in the choice of sports brands to use for example African American models to represent sports such as climbing, skiing, hiking where for a long time only Caucasian models were chosen, but also in the choice to be more and more age inclusive; it is no longer a novelty to see senior models representing a brand on their web and social pages, as well as oversize models representing different body shapes. Exp.17 brand claimed to offer fits for men with love handles and who have bellies instead of abs.

Image Consistency: For all brands interviewed, maintaining a consistent brand image is a crucial aspect, sometimes foregoing cultural localization. Brands need to be clearly recognizable, and this is done by consistently presenting brand values and using a global voice with local activations.

If in stores consistency for an Italian brand is achieved by using the same layout in the various stores, with staff welcoming customers by saying "Buongiorno", offering water and Italian products, and following a precise ceremonial, this is also true for some brands in terms of eCommerce and social media by standardizing communication or more specific elements such as the eCommerce homepages or by keeping one social media page per platform. What changes is the cultural approach of the customer and makes the brand adapt to their needs, calibrating services based on needs. The emphasis on concepts related to heritage and the geographical origin of certain products, the so called "made in", are aspects that emerged from the interviews with managers and executives working for luxury companies, particularly clothing and jewelry.

In general, localization means maintaining a balance between what must be there at the branding level, that is, what is the brand DNA and what is the interpretation of local cultures that must be taken into account.

Misunderstandings and crisis communication: Another aspect that emerged related to localization is the issue of cultural misunderstandings. For the

interviewed brands, finding the right balance between brand identity, appropriate communication, and respect for the cultures they approach remains a focal point. In this direction, some aspects to be considered by brands are the following: balancing the creative and sometimes provocative genius of designers with possible cultural misunderstandings, making sure that the contamination between different cultures does not turn into cultural appropriation, and avoiding that a global communication can be misunderstood by some cultures because it is not in line with their values.

4. How has Covid impacted your localization strategy?

Since the interviews began during the first wave of Covid19 and ran through May 2022 it has been chosen to add a question to managers with respect to the pandemic theme. Covid19 has been a booster for the digital transformation of fashion companies (McKinsey, 2020, Noris & Cantoni, 2021a) and therefore the question that was asked was whether this was also the case with respect to the Covid19 and online localization.

In general, managers confirmed that Covid19 has acted as a booster for digital localization processes. Exp.10 stated that her brand opened 9 new eCommerce websites worldwide in different countries and had increased the adaptation of services based on the needs of individual countries, not only in terms of the type of content and its communication, but also in the training of the sales force who has been taught, for example, to be more spontaneous in front of the camera during video calls with online customers or how to use WhatsApp Business or other digital tools. Exp.5 explained

that for its brand, Covid19 has been a booster for the development of its strategy on marketplaces such as Zalando and for the development of an even stronger omnichannel strategy. Moreover, her company despite being part of the luxury sector and therefore disinclined to discount, during Covid19 drastically increased discounts to reduce unsold goods due to closed stores, and also had to change the layout of products on eCommerce. On the eCommerce pages only, the products were uploaded and there were no backgrounds since no photo shoots could be realized.

Regarding communication choices during the pandemic period, Exp 17 of the denim brand explained that Covid19 disrupted their communication plans. They had to completely readjust their strategy and co-communication plans by shooting locally with models doing the shoots from their apartments. In that case the company chose to make a country-specific communication to try to be as close as possible to the people and not to give a staged image of what could have been a model on the beach or in the desert in such a critical moment.

Shooting campaigns executed prior to Covid19 were essentially discontinued. At the localization level, the latter was put in place for all communications through the website, newsletter, WhatsApp adapting the different actions by country and trying to keep up with local decrees issued by public health authorities and trying to have a tone of voice as human and compassionate as possible.

Exp. 10 said that in their case too there was a change in the tone of voice with an attempt to convey the fact that their stores were a safe place to go and that the brand

was organizing to offer online appointments or in-person appointments to avoid crowds. The brand therefore decided to communicate that the store was safe, that there was a possibility to buy online and that several new eCommerce pages would have been opened in different countries. The manager also stated that the company changed its strategy in terms of newsletters; ad hoc communications were sent out, referring to the fact that the brand was close to its customers and trying to show a high level of proximity. Other brand managers and executives stated that during Covid19 their focus was mainly on the Chinese market where the pandemic resolved faster, and markets recovered more.

Discussion

This research confirms that although localization is applied by fashion brands differently in terms of strategic choices and in different geographical areas depending on the sector (fast fashion, jewelry, luxury, sports, watches etc.), it can be considered a strategic element for the development of eCommerce (Noris et al. 2020). The elements that are most localized are calendars and holidays, language, payment methods and currency, and sizes; seasonality is mainly considered by sports brands, while models are almost never localized in favor of a constant unity. As for the social media choices of fashion brands, the response seems to be more homogeneous: the type of platform is more localized, but the trend is to have a single global account whenever and wherever possible, in order not to disperse followers in smaller accounts. However, some brands, especially sports brands, also localize their social

accounts based on the different sports subcultures (climbing, hiking, skiing, surfing, etc.) and based on the main cities in which they are active. A special mention should be made for countries such as China, Korea and Japan where the ecosystems and digital cultures are very different from the Western ones and therefore the same eCommerce and social media strategy does not work, as shown by the communication crises occurred for example to Valentino or Dolce & Gabbana or the controversy between Uniqlo and Nike (Noris & Cantoni 2022) and as shown by research done in the context of localization choices in fashion retail (Bai et al., 2022; Liu et al, 2014; Xie et al., 2015). Regarding China, Exp.16 stated that they regularly offer basic Chinese courses to their employees to learn to understand the culture and basics of the language. Although it was not possible to provide an unambiguous definition of localization and although fashion brands interpret this concept differently, some common denominators emerged: localization costs are a key factor for managers, their implementation choices tend to depend on the available budget, the value of retail in a given country and the sales potential of certain countries rather than others; moreover, fashion brands have realized the importance of brand image and consistency (Hsieh, 2002; Kapferer, 2008; Ross & Harradine, 2011;) therefore they are constantly looking for the right balance between a localized strategy, the communication of their brand image, heritage and related concepts such as the “made in” aspects; the issue of inclusivity is another key aspect when talking about localization, particularly with regard to fit for a wider range of body sizes and shapes, or age demographics (Black, 2022); Two other keywords that have emerged when talking about localization are

misunderstandings and crisis communication: whenever fashion companies place a content on a platform they have to pay attention to several aspects including tone, manner, place, culture, which allows them to decrease the risk of communication crises due to misunderstandings that in the digital environment can be even widened (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b; Noris & Cantoni 2022); Also the term omnichannel appeared to be in connection with the concept of localization. For the interviewed managers, omnichannel is a strategic factor for offline and digital retail. The two systems have to communicate and act in synergy in order to provide costumers a cohesive and integrated experience (Nam & Kannan, 2020; Portela et al., 2021). Finally, the last aspect connected to localization is related to the choice of people: people with the right skills allow fashion brands to localize in the most appropriate way (Fletcher et al, 2013; Nobile et al., 2021).

Regarding the communication choices during the pandemic period, although Noris & Cantoni (2021a) showed that not all brands adapted their Instagram communication during the first wave of Covid19, it should be noted that most of the interviewed managers stated that the pandemic not only accelerated the digitization processes but was also a challenge that allowed brands to understand the importance of a tailored communication able to meet the needs of people in a specific historical moment and in a specific country.

Conclusion

For fashion brands localization means being able to prioritize the localization of some elements rather than others on the basis of each company need; to manage the costs of localization, not only those of implementation but also those of maintenance over the long term; to choose the right people: it is not always possible for the headquarter brand to manage at 360 degrees the localization strategy in the various countries, so it is essential to hire the right people locally; to balance the need for brands to have a certain brand consistency with the need to approach different cultures and avoid communication crises. The focal point of fashion brands is to offer the customer a seamless experience, whether it be eCommerce, physical retail or social media.

A concept that emerged in the interviews is the idea of communicating also the concept of “made in” and heritage of a certain brand, which are becoming more and more often an instrument to present their brand consistency in the digital environment. Exp.7 working for a watch brand explained that for them localization of communication is not yet so relevant because customers look for their brand because they are a Swiss watch company, so this is more than enough to choose their product. In addition, Exp.5 explained that although for many brands the concept of “made in” is valuable for communicating their brand identity it is not always used for communication and marketing purposes since for example in their case not everything is produced in their country of origin, therefore they prefer to focus on other points of strengths.

Although the interviewed managers and executives were not able to provide with their own words a definition of localization, due to the fact that they tend to include it within their digital communication and marketing strategies, the analysis of the transcripts and notes suggest the following updated definition: *localization can be defined as a cultural translation that does not only take into account the national borders of the countries with which one interfaces, but also takes into account subcultures, minorities and in general the diversity of the various groups, and also considers the temporality of the choices that have to be done. Localizing does not only mean doing it at a spatial level but also at a temporal level.*

Some managers stated that they had to adapt their communication to the pandemic, and they explained for example that also some communication and marketing choices implemented before the Black Lives Matter movement would no longer be implemented today.

According to the results of the research, social media are mainly used by fashion brands to communicate the brand soul, except in some markets such as China or Korea, for example. Social media primarily serve fashion brands to represent brand identity and function as a showcase to communicate consistently and coherently with their audience. eCommerce platforms, on the other hand, are used to place products more appropriately in each market, and thus the more localized are the above-mentioned elements, the more effective the localization strategy will be.

Future research could increase the number of companies interviewed. In addition, future studies might consider the perspective of consumers and find out how they feel about localization through, for example, usability tests or through questionnaires. Future studies might consider the issue of localization of newsletters in more depth, as seven managers stated that newsletters are localized geographically, and messages sent to customers are sent based on geographic area and key consumption periods. Exp.15, for example, stated that she localizes newsletter contents based on the weather forecasts for various regions, whereas Exp.17 stated that the number of newsletters sent to customers in Europe is significantly lower than the number of newsletters sent to the US where more aggressive communication choices are preferred. Exp.4 explained that she sends more newsletters to countries where the brand carries more weight and is bought more. Exp.7 explained that her company localizes newsletters not much referring to the geographical localization but considering more the type of customers in their database: they have segmented 10 types of audiences to which they send different newsletters. Sometimes brands choose to send city-specific newsletters or even to customers of certain stores in specific areas where, for example, an event will be held.

Future studies could also consider localization strategies of online advertising campaigns. Exp.1 explained that in their case often the marketing team launches a global campaign that “speaks to everyone” and then local teams can choose to create their own version of the campaign which is called “local extension”. In other cases,

local teams launch purely local campaigns based on the interests of their market. Another aspect that could be further explored in future studies is the issue of localization in cosmetic companies that have not been addressed in this paper and where for example skin type, color, the way skins react could influence localization strategies, as explained by one of the interviewees.

In conclusion, it can be stated that although localization is not a new element in marketing and communication for brands, it is a strategic element whose objective is to be as locally relevant as possible, while maintaining a global identity.

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10. Localization and Cultural Adaptation on the Web: An Explorative Study in the Fashion Domain⁵⁵

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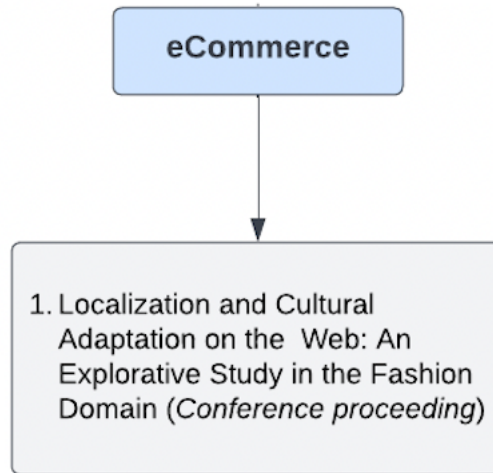


Fig. 11: PhD Thesis Design - Localization and Cultural Adaptation on the Web:
An Explorative Study in the Fashion Domain

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Abstract. The use of the internet and of the (mass) media have in some way technically simplified the internationalization processes of companies, reducing the time needed in order to exchange data and information and facilitating the resolution of operational issues. Within this environment, fashion plays a relevant role; in fact, a considerable part of website and e-commerce offers come from this sector. When facing new markets, fashion companies cannot only provide unique and captivating products, but they also need to

offer an opportune and personalized communication, able to cross all the cultural and linguistic boundaries that might occur. In order to face this issue a well-designed localization strategy is required. According to Mele et al. [1] localization can be defined as a “cultural translation” and when applied to online contents it consists in the adaptation of different elements such as texts, images, videos, but also units of measure, sizes or calendars. The paper aims, in this sense, to address the lack of literature concerning localization practices in the online fashion environment, providing a first framework on the depiction of the different cultural values on different fashion websites. The present study is an exploratory benchmarking of the field, realized through a comparative research, based on previous studies related to the depiction of Hofstede’s [2] and Hall’s [3] cultural values provided by Singh et al. and Yalcin et al. [4, 5].

Keywords: Cultural adaptation · Digital fashion · Fashion companies · Localization · Websites

1 Introduction

The scholar Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s proposed the neologism “global village”, today synonymous with globalization, to emphasize that through the diffusion of media technologies the world has taken on the typical traits of a village [6]. This term represents the status of modern men and women moving from “local”, consisting in a dimension close to them, to “global”, embracing the whole world. According to Magu, the world we live in is characterized by hastening, boosting interconnections, which help people to interact with all four corners of the world crossing political and geographical boundaries [7].

Globalization has been accelerated by the birth of the most powerful mean of (mass) communication: internet. Its widespread adoption has simplified the transmission of data and information and has accelerated both general and industry-specific globalization aspects [8].

If much has been done from a technological point of view with the implementation of increasingly innovative devices and software, allowing people to overcome spatial barriers, not all the knots have been untied, neither cultural nor language barriers have been broken down. In this sense, Human Computer Interaction (HCI) studies are constantly needed in order to face the gap between the development of new technologies and their adaptation to different cultures.

In this direction while there is a consensus on the value of the localization and the cultural adaptation on the web for the sales and the marketing sector [9], or in the touristic field [10], this topic is instead under-researched when referring to the localization and cultural adaptation of online contents of fashion companies.

Localization as represented by LISA can be defined as “the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets” (p. 13) [11].

According to Pym “localization means adapting features to suit a particular ‘locale’, which is in turn understood as a market segment defined by criteria including language, currency, and perhaps educational level or income bracket, depending on the nature of the communication” (p. 3) [12].

Some elements localized include date and time formats, units of measure and sizes, color conventions, iconic and legal conventions, currency, address and name formats, contents, sound and video files, connection speed, calendars and also historical, cultural and religious aspects which are shared in a given country [13, 14].

As stated by Singh et al. [4] although the importance recognized to localization by marketers, there is still a lack of competences and expertise in order to adapt online contents to the different consumers.

Furthermore, by now, the topic of localization has been addressed in the fashion field only in relation with the offline retail environment [15], or the cultural differences within the management of textile and clothing companies [16], not taking yet into account the

pervasiveness and the relevance of localization/standardization issue in the online and e-commerce area.

This study aims, therefore, to explore for the first time, whether and how cultural differences affect the adaptation of web contents in fashion websites, in order to fill this research gap and to detect whether fashion companies adapt contents when addressing different online markets.

For this purpose, a benchmarking exploratory study, derived from previous studies of Singh et al. and Yalcin et al. [4, 5] and based on Hofstede's [2] four cultural dimensions and Hall's context dimension [3], has been proposed.

As a result, a new framework, which contributes to enrich cultural studies has been performed, extending the research to the digital fashion domain. The analysis has been carried out through a test on three fashion websites: Boohoo, H&M, and Uniqlo (the reasons that led us to choose these fashion brands will be explained within the research design section).

The research is organized as follows: the first section is dedicated to the literature review, in order to propose a theoretical framework. The second and the third sections have been dedicated to the research design and to the methodology, proposing different hypotheses. The fourth and the fifth section describe the results and conclude the paper.

2 Literature Review

Over the centuries, the word fashion has evolved: the term moved from the Latin word *factio* from *facere* (do, make) to the Old French word *facon* and to the well-known Middle English word *fashion*, which means shape, appearance.

Skov and Melchior [17] consider fashion as a word with two different meanings – clothing and something which is popular, trendy and usually fugacious.

Based on the studies of Craik [18], Lennon et al. [19] define fashion as “the way we wear our clothes, adorn our bodies, and train our bodies to move to highlight the relationships between bodies and their sociocultural context” (p. 170).

Many scholars, that approach this topic, in fact, are more often interested to the cultural and historical development of the concept, rather than on the global phenomenon of dress [17].

Fashion has in fact, a significative relationship with culture: the different perspectives in which we divide the English word culture (which derives from the Latin verb *colere* “to care”, “to look after”) such as cultivating natural/physical land, taking care of other human beings and entering in connection with God [10], can also be applied to the world of fashion; to produce clothes and cosmetics we use natural materials or we create new artificial ones; we dress according to our style, deeply influenced by our cultural background; we use ad-hoc clothes and cosmetics to communicate during major events of human life – weddings, religious ceremonies, holidays, etc. [20].

According to Hofstede, the way people dress has a symbolic value and it should be considered as one of the outer layer of each culture, since together with words, gestures, pictures or objects it carries a particular meaning, which is only recognizable by those who share the same culture [2].

Following this perspective, fashion could also be considered as a matter of communication: the way we dress ourselves is something that goes beyond functional needs. Wearing clothes helps people to communicate who they are and/or who they would like to be; thanks to fashion and the way we dress, we have the possibility to enter in relationship with other persons and communities [20], sharing (or not) particular meanings of the different cultures.

Given the variety of theories concerning cultural models proposed in the literature [21], we have chosen to keep in consideration Hofstede’s model [2] in order to analyze and categorize fashion websites, because, although we are aware of the shortcomings of this

research [21], the model has already been successfully validated in different research areas such as in business by Singh et al. and Yalcin et al. [4, 5], in psychology by Triandis [22], in marketing by Soares et al. [23] and in tourism by Tigre Moura et al. [24, 25] and by Mele et al. [1, 10].

Hofstede in 1980, after conducting, together with other researchers, two surveys, the first between 1967–69, and the second between 1971–73, with workers of IBM subsidiaries in 72 different countries, published his landmark study *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values*, performing the largest survey concerning work values and obtaining 116,000 individual answers and covering more than 30 different topics. With this research and the following updated versions, the scholar contributed to define the concept of culture also with indexes and with a big amount of data.

The 1980's model proposed by Hofstede is considered a multiple dimension model, in which culture is depicted in four bipolar dimensions: Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance and Masculinity versus Femininity. Later in 2010, in the third edition of *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind* [2] together with Minkov, Hofstede extended his work including a fifth and a sixth dimension: the Long Term versus Short Term Orientation and the Indulgence versus Restraint dimensions. Following to Singh et al. and Yalcin et al. studies [4, 5] in the present paper we will take into consideration only the first four bipolar dimensions.

In order to define our theoretical framework, our research as proposed by Singh et al. and Yalcin et al. [4, 5] has also taken into account the studies of Edward Hall et al. [3, 26, 27], who differentiated cultures basing them on a bipolar dimension indicated with the terms Low- versus High-context.

According to Capece et al. [28] national cultures and country specific values still play a significant role in affecting online consumer behavior within e-commerce platforms, therefore their importance is widely recognized by marketers in terms of marketing and communication strategies [5].

If we consider data elaborated by Marketing Charts in 2018 [29], which show that fashion is expected to reach \$765 billion sales by the year 2022, significantly affecting the e-commerce performances and influencing both domestic and international companies, it becomes clear why a particular attention should be paid to localization strategies and cultural adaptation, when firms decide to internationalize. Fashion items are considered a valuable category within e-commerce environment and despite the still evident relevance of retail-stores, online platforms have seen a significative flourishing, allowing companies to expand internationally their business and offering them the chance to increase their perspectives of growth [30].

According to Singh et al., the adaptation of digital contents to local cultures is becoming progressively relevant. The uniqueness of the web as a marketing channel due to its lack of access barriers, further increments the value of understanding of which website's contents should be adapted and which not [31].

In such an international and intercultural context, where digital communication has become ubiquitous, it is therefore crucial also for fashion companies to understand how to communicate products and cultural values, in order to succeed in the digital environment, when interfacing their own market or a new one.

3 Research Design

After detecting and analyzing the main contributions regarding web cultural adaptation based on the studies offered by Singh et al. and Yalcin et al. [4, 5], and on the researches proposed by Tigre Moura et al. [24, 25] and Mele et al. [1, 10] concerning the localization in the touristic field, which presents some similarities with the fashion domain, we opted to apply Yalcin et al. model [5], based on Singh et al. model [4] in order to pursue a first exploratory analysis on the depiction of cultural values in fashion companies' websites.

The study has been performed on websites because Web pages and e-commerce are considered the showcase on the world of a brand, and they are "owned media" fully

controlled by the companies, while social-media are in most cases standardized and fashion brands often present a single international account for each social media, not considering neither technical localization practices nor the adaptation of cultural contents.

To realize the present research, the first four Hofstede's cultural dimensions [2] and Hall's dimension [3] have been taken into consideration: Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, Masculinity versus Femininity and Low- versus High-context cultures.

The research analyzes the representation of cultural values proposed by three international fast fashion companies: Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo.

These three fast fashion companies have been chosen in order to test the model because after a first preliminary review of fashion companies, they appeared to be the companies that localize the most, at least in terms of the most evident elements such as sizes, currencies, languages, media contents, etc. Another reason that lead us to consider these three companies is that these brands offer different Web pages per each country, which has been analyzed in the present paper.

Furthermore, according to SimilarWeb analysis platform [32] in 2019 H&M performed as the fashion company the highest web traffic; while Uniqlo, according to reports by Kantar Group and Modaes [33], is considered among the brands, that have mostly grown in 2019; Boohoo was chosen for convenience for the study, and because it is a brand, that according to its annual report performed in 2019 a global revenue of 856,9 million, up to 48%, clearly showing its grown [34].

The analysis of the cultural adaptation of the three companies has been carried out for the Web pages dedicated to three different countries: Australia, Italy and Russian Federation. These countries were chosen for mainly two reasons: the first one is related to their representativeness in terms of culture and language; the second one is related to their geographical distance, which allows us to better understand, whether and how companies work in terms of localization. Furthermore, the geographical positions in terms of

Southern/ Northern hemisphere helped us to understand whether these brands consider or not the seasons of the countries when they put on the e-commerce their collections or whether they have a standardized strategy.

Based on the above-presented literature review we formulated the following five hypotheses.

Considering the first cultural value proposed by Hofstede [2, 35], while Australia is perceived as a relatively high Individualist culture, because people tend to take care of themselves and their close family members and the Russian Federation is considered a collectivist country, because people tend to belong to groups, composed by family, friends and not seldom the neighborhood, where human relationships are crucial, Italy place itself in between; Italy is considered an Individualist and “I” centered culture, with a collectivist influence coming from the southern area of the country.

Based on this we formulated our first hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 1: The Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo Web pages of the Australian website show a higher level of individualism, than the Italian edition and the one related to the Russian Federation, which display instead, a higher level of collectivism.

The second dimension, which is taken into account in our research is the Uncertainty Avoidance: it refers to what extent a society is willing to accept the unpredictability of the future. In a country where there is a high level of Uncertainty Avoidance aversion, such as Russia, people might feel much more threatened and anxious by ambiguous situations, which occur during life. Also, Italy shows a pretty high score if we refer to this dimension, Australia instead, is placed in an intermediate position. Therefore, we formulated the second hypothesis as follows:

- Hypothesis 2: The Boohoo, H&M and Uniqlo Web pages of the Australian edition show a lower score of Uncertainty Avoidance if compared with the Italian and the Russian website.

The third dimension proposed is the one referred to the Power Distance, which has been individuated by analyzing to what extent people are keen on accepting inequalities in the distribution of power within any kind of institutions. Among the three nations taken into account Australia presents the lowest level of power distance, hierarchies are established for convenience and communications are usually perceived as informal and inclusive; the Russian Federation instead, presents the highest level of Power Distance, in the country the status symbol plays a significant role in people's everyday life. Italy places itself in between, since it is a nation where the Power Distance is generally well accepted in the Southern part and disliked in the Northern area. Consequently, our third hypothesis is the following:

- Hypothesis 3: The Boohoo, H&M and Uniqlo Web pages of the Russian and Italian editions display a higher degree of Power Distance, if compared with the Australian case.

The fourth Hofstede's dimension to be considered is the Masculinity versus Femininity dimension. A high score on this dimension means being a masculine society, oriented to competition and success. A feminine society is driven instead, by the importance of the quality of life and modesty. In this direction, Russia is the most feminine society among the three; Italy and Australia are rather considered masculine countries, because of their high predisposition in showing the success achieved and in expressing the importance of being a winner within the community. Based on this, we formulated our hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 4: The Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo Web pages of the Russian websites present a lower score in the masculinity dimension preferring the femininity values, if compared with the Australian and Italian editions of the websites, which demonstrate a higher score of masculinity.

The fifth dimension, which has been taken into consideration is derived from Hall's studies [3], which describes cultures as High or Low Context.

High-context communities tend to communicate in an indirect manner, they tend to combine verbal communication with nonverbal elements such as the body language. On

the contrary, Low-context countries prefer to directly communicate information using clear verbal contents. Usunier and Roulin [36], which performed their research on the influence of High- and Low-context communication of business-to-business websites, proposed a classification of countries according to levels of Low versus High-context communication styles, where Australia was displayed as a Low-Medium context country and Italy and the Russian Federation respectively as Medium and Medium-High context nations. According to this, we formed the following hypothesis for the fashion domain:

- Hypothesis 5: The Boohoo, H&M and Uniqlo Web pages of the Australian websites show more elements related to a Low-context oriented nation, while the Italian Web pages place in-between and the Russian websites present more aspects which are attributed to High-context cultures.

In the end, the preliminary review that we performed in order to select the above-mentioned fast fashion companies, led us also to consider in our study the following research question: in which measure some elements that are often considered as part of a more technical localization in fashion websites such as sizes, calendars, currencies and pictures (in our case models) [13] are displayed in Boohoo, H&M, Uniqlo country related Web page?

4 Methodology

The study has been performed through a preliminary benchmark based on researches elaborated by Yalcin et al. [5], and based on Singh et al. previous studies [4], who proposed a model (See Table 1), whose aim is to depict cultural values online. In order to make the research appropriate for fashion websites we have slightly adapted Yalcin's framework [5] indicating in italics each modification.

Singh et al.'s method [4] first and that of Yalcin et al. [5] later are based on Hofstede and Hall's studies [2, 3] and have been applied to multinationals' websites and later adapted in other fields such as tourism [1, 25], in order to depict cultural values within the online tourism environment. Singh et al. [4, 31, 37], Yalcin et al. [5], Tigre Moura et al. [24, 25]

and Mele et al. [1], in order to validate their methods of evaluation of cultural values performed in their studies a content analysis, which led them to significative results in their area of interest.

In the fashion marketing and communication field as well, the content analysis has been fruitfully performed by Touchette et al. [38] in order to examine features of branded entertainment in apparel brands' or by Morris and Nichols [39] to evaluate the role of magazine advertisements in countries such as France and United States.

Table 1. Application of Yalcin et al. Model [5] based on Singh et al. studies [4]

Design - Dimension	Category	Operationalization in Fashion
Collectivism	Community relations	Presence or absence of community policy, giving back to community, social responsibility policy, <i>sustainability</i> .
	Club Chat rooms	Presence or absence of members club, product-based clubs, chat with company people, chat with interest groups, message boards, discussion groups, <i>reviews</i> and live talks.
	Newsletter	Online subscriptions, magazines, and newsletters.
	Family theme	Pictures of family, pictures of teams of employees, mention of employee teams and emphasis on team and collective work responsibility in vision statement or elsewhere on the web site, and emphasis on customers as a family.
	Reference, symbols and pictures of national identity	Flags, pictures of historic monuments, <i>anniversaries</i> , pictures reflecting uniqueness of the country, country specific symbols in the form of icons, and "indexes".

	Loyalty programs	Frequent miles programs, customer loyalty programs, and company credit cards for specific country, special membership programs.
	Link to local websites	Links to country locations, related country specific companies, and other local web sites from a particular country.
Individualism	Good privacy statement	Privacy policy and how personal information will be protected or used.
	Independence theme	Images and themes depicting self-reliance, self-recognition, and achievement.
	Brand or product uniqueness	Unique selling points of the product/brand and product/brand differentiation features.
	Personalization	Features like gift recommendations, individual acknowledgements or greeting, and Web page personalization.
Uncertainty Avoidance	Customer service	FAQs, customer service option, customer contact or customer service e-mails, <i>chat bots</i> .
	Guided navigation	Site maps, well-displayed links, links in the form of pictures or buttons, forward, backward up and down navigation buttons.
	Tradition theme	Emphasis on history and ties of a particular company with a nation, emphasis on respect, veneration of elderly and the culture, phrases like ‘most respected company’, ‘keeping the tradition alive’, ‘for generations’, ‘company legacy’.
	Local stores and services	Mention of contact information for local offices, dealers, and shops.
	Local terminology	Like use of country specific metaphors, names of festivals, puns, and a general

		local touch in the vocabulary of the Web page not just mere translation.
	Toll free numbers	To call at any time around the clock.
	Free trails or downloads	Free stuff, free downloads, free screen savers, free product trails, free coupons to try the products or services, free memberships, free service information or free app.
	Testimonials	Testimonials from customers, trust-enhancing features like reliability seals, seals of trust, and ethical business practices from third parties.
Power Distance	Company hierarchy information	Information about the ranks of company personnel, information about organizational chart, and information about country managers.
	Pictures of CEO's and Celebs	Pictures of executives, important people in the industry, celebrities or <i>influencers</i> .
	Quality assurance and awards	Mention of awards won, mention of quality assurance information and quality certification by international and local agencies.
	Pride of ownership appeal	Web sites depict satisfied customers, fashion statement for the use of product, and the use of reference groups to portray pride.
	Proper titles	Titles of the important people in the company, titles of the people in the contact information, and titles of people on the organizational charts.
	Vision statement	The vision for the company as stated by the CEO or top management.

Masculinity/ Femininity	Quizzes and games	Games, quizzes, fun stuff to do on the web site, tips and tricks, recipes, and other fun information.
	Realism theme	Less fantasy and imagery on the web site, to-the-point information.
	Product effectiveness	Durability information, quality information, product attribute information, and product robustness information.
	Clear gender roles	Separate pages for men and women, depiction of women in nurturance roles, depiction of women in positions of telephone operators, models, wives, and mothers; depiction of men as macho, strong, and in positions of power.
Low Context	Rank or prestige of the company	Features like company rank in the industry, listing in Forbes or Fortune, and numbers showing the growth and importance of the company.
	Hardsell approach	Discounts, promotions, coupons, and emphasis on product advantages using explicit comparison.
	Explicit Comparisons	Comparison of the company to others.
	Use of superlatives	Use of superlative words and sentences: like 'We are the number one', 'The top company', 'The leader', and 'World's largest'.
	Terms and conditions of use and purchase	Product return policy, warranty and other conditions
High Context	Politeness and indirectness	Greetings from the company, images and pictures reflecting politeness, flowery language, use of indirect expressions like

		'perhaps', 'probably' and 'somewhat'. Overall humbleness in company philosophy and corporate information.
	Softsell approach	Use of affective and subjective impressions of intangible aspects of a product or service, and more entertainment theme to promote the product.
	Esthetics	Attention to esthetic details, liberal use of colors, high bold colors, emphasis on images and context, and use of love and harmony appeal

In our research the benchmark sample is composed by three fast fashion brands H&M, Uniqlo and Boohoo, which have been compared considering three different country specific website versions: Australia, Italy and Russian Federation.

Table 2 shows the results of our research, also considering the above-mentioned research question and they have been organized as follows: the chosen countries have been abbreviated using “Ita” for Italy, “Ru” for the Russian Federation and “Au” for Australia and the phrase “Represented on the Website” has been abbreviated with the terms “Represent. On the Website”.

To perform this exploratory study, we classified each category proposed by Yalcin et al. [5], and that composes our design dimension, with a “+” when the category is present and a “—” when it is not present (Table 2).

The process of analysis has taken place from the 14.01.2020 until the 23.01.2020, considering an average of 10–15 Web pages for each website version.

For the present research elements that are shown on the international websites of the chosen company through a direct and specific link and reference on the country specific website have been considered as present elements in our Results section and they have been indicated with an “*” in Table 2.

5 Results and Discussion

As a result of our research question we can outline in our study that the three analyzed companies Boohoo, H&M and Uniqlo tend to perform the online localization of the above-mentioned technical elements (calendars/ seasonality, currencies, models and sizes).

Considering seasonality as first aspect, we can affirm that this issue has been considered and, in most cases, the contents have been adapted by the three brands.

H&M, in each country Homepage, makes reference to the seasonality of the products or the services: on the Russian Web page are indicated mid-season must have on the Australian one is indicated the return to school after the summer vacation and in the Italian one the next spring season. Uniqlo, as well, refers to seasonality in all the three considered countries respectively mentioning the next spring-summer season for Italy and respectively the autumn and summer sales for the Russian Federation and for Australia.

Boohoo clearly refers to summer or winter collections within the trend sections in the Russian and Australian Web pages, but not in the Italian one.

Concerning currencies, the analysis shows that it is possible to make a purchase on each company e-commerce using the currencies of the three considered countries, apart from H&M Australia, where customers do not have at their disposal an ad-hoc e-commerce section.

As highlighted for currency section, also in case of localization of models H&M, Uniqlo and Boohoo in particular, tend to change some images and people within them, depending on the three chosen countries.

The last category, which has been taken into account from a more technical point of view is the size: concerning this element, Boohoo is the company that pays more attention, adapting each size to the local units of measure. Uniqlo and H&M instead, provide tables

where potential customers can compare the local sizes of the three countries with the one, which have been taken into consideration by the two companies as standard version.

Results related to application of Yalcin et al. model [5] show a different situation in terms of cultural adaptation.

First of all, it must be noted that in many cases, elements such as “Community Relations, Family Theme, Company Hierarchy Information, Pictures of CEO’s and *Celebs*, Quality Assurance and Awards, Proper Titles, Vision Statements, Rank or Prestige of the Company and the Use of Explicit Comparisons” haven’t been translated from a linguistic point of view by the three companies; the three brands tend to differentiate their Web pages in terms of presence or absence of specific links indicating these specific categories, directly redirecting the user from the country specific website to the inter- national one, or simply remaining on the country-related Web Page but avoiding in this sense the linguistic translation and a more in-depth and detailed cultural adaptation.

Entering in detail in the results related to the aspects of cultural adaptation we can affirm that the hypotheses we proposed in our Research Design, according to Yalcin et al. previous studies [5], cannot all have been confirmed.

The chosen companies performed different results in terms of cultural adaptation and from this first exploratory analysis it appears evident that not all the country-specific values are taken into account when companies address localization.

Presenting each brand and its results (see Table 2), we can assert that from this first pilot study that even though Boohoo performs a high level of technical localization, it is the brand that displays the lowest level of cultural adaptation. Although the brand offers an e-commerce section per each considered country and at a first sight the Web pages looks different according to each country, the categories proposed by Yalcin et al. [5] are equally displayed within Australia, Italy and Russian Federation Web pages without any significative result. The only value which displays different results within the three countries is the Uncertainty Avoidance: Boohoo Australia shows a higher level of this

value if compared with Italy and Russian Federation not confirming our second hypothesis.

H&M instead, presents a more complex framework from the cultural adaptation point of view (Table 2): in the H&M case study the hypotheses 1, 2, 3 have been confirmed. The Russian and the Italian H&M Web pages, performed the same results: if compared with the Australian Web page, a higher level of Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance and Power Distance is shown.

Concerning instead, our fourth and fifth hypotheses the Australian Web page could not have been taken into account in this preliminary study, because even though H&M presents an ad-hoc website for the country, it does not offer an e-commerce platform so we could not evaluate the categories Product Effectiveness and Hard/Soft Sell Approach respectively related to Masculinity/Femininity and Low/High Context values. In the case of the representation of Masculinity/Femininity values in the Russian and Italian Web pages, H&M displayed the same results not confirming our hypothesis.

In the fifth hypothesis Russia is instead, depicted as a lower context country than Italy, not confirming our assumption.

Results performed by Uniqlo (Table 2) are similar to H&M in the case of our first hypothesis related to Collectivism/Individualism: Russian Federation presented the highest score of Collectivism followed by the Italian Web page.

In the case of our second hypothesis related to Uncertainty Avoidance it must be noted that even though for the Russian H&M Web page the hypothesis was confirmed, for the Australian and Italian Web Pages results have been inverted, therefore partially confirming the overall hypothesis.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 are not confirmed: as per Boohoo the three compared countries obtained the same results in terms of Power Distance and Masculinity/Femininity values.

Finally, the fifth hypothesis shows also for Uniqlo that Russia is represented as the lowest-context country among the three not confirming our last hypothesis.

In conclusion, through this exploratory research we can affirm that as for the study proposed by Yalcin et al. [5] also in our case the hypothesis related to Masculinity/Femininity could not have been confirmed, and out of the remaining 4 hypotheses the two related to Collectivism/Individualism and to Uncertainty Avoidance have been confirmed by H&M and Uniqlo and the one related to Power Distance has been confirmed only by H&M.

6 Conclusions, Limitations, and Further Work

The objective of this paper was to propose a first preliminary step in order to check whether fashion brands perform localization activities based on country-related Web pages.

Even though, according to Singh et al. [4] researching on cultural contents on web-sites could be considered a valid method in order to help managers to avoid cultural misunderstanding and communication crisis, when interfacing with new markets, and designing country-specific websites, this paper underlined that in fashion there is still a gap when considering the adaptation of cultural values online.

Despite the importance recognized to the localization, the dilemma whether localizing or not, is still open, and there is also an open debate within companies on whether and how to address this issue [5].

This exploratory study is a first attempt to add to the existing literature related to online localization a framework for the fashion environment, contributing to widen the studies on online cultural depiction and localization. Additionally, the research represents a first step in order to understand whether fashion companies keep in consideration the different aspects of cultures, with whom they are interfacing or whether they tend to represent elements related to the culture of the country of origin of the brand.

In this direction, further studies are needed in order to determine whether Yalcin et al. method [5] can be applied to the fashion environment without significative changes related to the peculiarity of the field or whether we need to develop a new methodology able to detect marketing concerns, which might affect the results on the depiction of cultural values in the online fashion world.

In order to further develop this area of study also the limitations of the present research must be taken into consideration: the first one is related to the fact that the present research only considers three case studies so more extensive researches are needed, not only taking into consideration fast fashion companies, but also considering luxury brands, accessories brands and e-commerce platforms such as Asos, Yoox or Zalando, which gained through the years a key role in terms of fashion revenues. Moreover, this paper does not take into account the point of view and the direct experience of marketing and communication managers, who work within these companies, so further studies are needed also to understand how localization and cultural adaptation of values are perceived by marketers and whether they consider it a key aspect of their brand strategy.

In the end, this paper addressed two significative open questions: are fashion companies in the online environment taking into account localization and cultural adaptation strategies? Do they consider localization as a mere technical aspect, purposely avoiding cultural adaptation in favor of a more globalized strategy?

Considering our first study and the chosen samples we can assert that in the three brands a technical localization is displayed, but only a few values related to cultural adaptation are represented, further studies are therefore needed in order to widen our number of samples and to address this issue in a more detailed manner.

This first analysis shows that fashion is a very complex environment and even though it presents many similarities with other fields such as tourism [1, 10, 24, 25], it presents many peculiarities that make necessary further researches.

Annex

Table 2. Results

Technical Localization									
Companies Represent. On Website	Boohoo _It	Boohoo_ ru	Boohoo_ au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_ Ita	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au
Calendars and Seasonality	–	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Currency	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	/
Models	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Sizes	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Collectivism									
Companies Represent. On Website	Boohoo _It	Boohoo_ ru	Boohoo_ au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_ I ta	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au
Community relations	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Clubs or chat Rooms	–	–	–	+	+	+	+	+	–

Newsletter	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Family theme	++	++	++	++	++	—	+	+	+
Reference, Symbols and pictures of national identity	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Loyalty programs	+	+	+	—	+	—	+	+	—
Link to local websites	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Individualism									
	Boohoo _It	Boohoo _ru	Boohoo _au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_I ta	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au
Good privacy statement	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Independence theme	+	+	+	+	+	+	—	—	+
Brand or Product uniqueness	+	+	+	+	+	+	—	—	—

Personalization	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	–
Uncertainty Avoidance									
	Boohoo _It	Boohoo _ru	Boohoo _au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_I ta	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au
Customer service	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Guided navigation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Tradition Theme	–	–	–	–	+	–	–	–	–
Local stores and services	–	–	+*	+	+	+	+	+	+
Local Terminology	–	+	+	+	+	+	–	–	–
Toll-free numbers	–	–	–	–	+	–	+	+	+
Free trials or downloads	–	–	+	–	+	+	+	+	–
Testimonials	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

Power Distance									
	Boohoo _It	Boohoo _ru	Boohoo _au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_I ta	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au
Company hierarchy information	++	++	++	+	+	+	++	++	++
Pictures of CEOs and <i>Celebs</i>	++	++	++	+	+	+	++	++	+
Quality assurance and awards	++	++	++	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pride of ownership appeal	—	—	—	—	—	—	+	+	—
Proper Titles	++	++	++	+	+	+	+	+	++
Vision Statement	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Masculinity									
	Boohoo _It	Boohoo _ru	Boohoo _au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_I ta	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au

Quizzes and games	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Realism theme	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-
Product effectiveness	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	/
Clear gender roles	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Low Context									
	Boohoo _It	Boohoo _ru	Boohoo _au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_ ta	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au
Rank or prestige of the company	-	-	-	+*	+*	+*	-	-	-
Hardsell approach	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	/
Explicit comparisons	-	-	-	+*	+*	+*	-	-	-
Use of superlatives	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-

Terms and condition of use and purchase	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
High Context									
	Boohoo _It	Boohoo _ru	Boohoo _au	Uniqlo_ ita	Uniqlo_ Ru	Uniqlo_ Au	H&M_I ta	H&M_ Ru	H&M_ Au
Politeness and Indirectness	–	–	–	–	–	–	+	–	+
Softsell approach	–	–	–	–	–	–	+	–	/
Esthetics	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	–

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11. 'The Good Italian' Fashion Films as Lifestyle Manifestos. A research based on thematic analysis and digital analytics⁵⁶



Fig. 12: PhD Thesis Design - 'The Good Italian' Fashion Films as Lifestyle Manifestos. A research based on thematic analysis and digital analytics

The continuous intertwining of cinema and digital technologies has allowed fashion films to spread as a new genre, through which fashion companies propose their products, entertain, and inspire their audience, share their heritage and tradition, and communicate their brand identity. This study presents the case of *The Good Italian*, a 3-episodes-story of the Prince of Soragna and his journey through Italian (life)style, published by the Italian Caruso menswear company. Through a thematic analysis of each video, the company's archive, the digital analytics provided by the Caruso YouTube channel, as well as thanks

⁵⁶ Noris, A., Cantoni, L. (*submitted*). 'The Good Italian' Fashion Films as Lifestyle Manifestos. A research based on thematic analysis and digital analytics.

to an interview with the former company CEO, who was deeply involved in the conceptualization and realization of the films, this paper aims to answer two main research questions: (i) How has the very topic of being a “Good Italian” been translated into the three fashion films? (ii) How have the films been distributed, and which audiences did they reach? Thanks to the unique opportunity of accessing its digital analytics and the company archived documents, together with the interview, this paper provides a view on the case well beyond what can be assessed by an outsider, a view that is relevant for both researchers on digital fashion communication and on fashion films, as well as for practitioners in the field.

Keywords: fashion Marketing; fashion Film; Culture; Social Media; Stereotypes

Introduction

Cinema production processes and the lifecycle of video products have been deeply impacted by the digital transformation (Pardo, 2015). On one hand, what were once “special effects” have been integrated into a mixed reality, in which the reproduction of physical objects, their digital editing, and the insertion/animation of digital ones increasingly interact, sometimes making it difficult for the viewer to distinguish real elements from computer-generated ones, and vice versa. Even the characters themselves with their skins, clothes and other accessories are then reproduced (also) as completely digital objects, giving rise to digital costume design. Such new context has allowed video production to become an activity accessible to an ever-larger number of people, who through their smartphones or devices make videos of better quality, making the production and sharing of videos a distinctive activity of contemporary life (*anonymized for review*). On the other hand, as far as the aspect of fruition is concerned, cinema movies have had to adapt to the digital world by combining their original model based on theatres with new access modalities, influenced by the emergence of television and later by digital platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Video and Disney+. Such a continuous intertwining of cinema and technology has allowed fashion films to spread as an independent genre (*anonymized for review*; Uhlirova, 2013).

Within the industry, the concept of fashion film is used to refer to creative audiovisual projects produced for fashion houses (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). Buffo (2019) defines fashion films as online videos created by fashion brands based on branded content translated into moving images; they are usually inspired by cinematography, although they have developed their own way of communicating through net-aesthetics and contribute to creating a stronger brand identity. Three main types of narrative choices are usually adopted by fashion brands to develop their fashion films or fashion sagas: (i) telling a story; (ii) creating or reinforcing brand personality; (iii) evoking atmosphere (Buffo, 2017). Fashion films are considered by fashion companies a valuable marketing and communication tool, useful not only to present a certain product or content but also to entertain their audiences. Through such movies, fashion brands have enriched their activities and have started to share their heritage and tradition with their audiences through a new form of storytelling, avoiding to continuously showcasing their brand logo (Buffo, 2017; Buffo, 2019; Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). Fashion films, therefore, are not to be considered just a new way of advertising and launching a particular product or collection, but rather as a branded content strategy and a form of online short film that fashion companies choose to use as an element of their branding strategy (Mijovic, 2013; Ramos Serrano & Pineda, 2009; Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016).

The present article aims to analyze the case of a fashion film saga produced by the menswear company Caruso, founded in 1958 by Neapolitan tailor Raffaele Caruso and acquired in 2009 by Umberto Angeloni, and since 2021 part of the conglomerate Fonsun (Bolelli, 2019). Such saga is titled *The Good Italian*, a 3-episodes-story of the Prince of Soragna and his journey through Italian (life)style. The case will be used to understand if and how this movie genre can be used by a fashion brand to convey its identity and the idea of “Made in”, to be understood not only as a production made in a certain country but rather as a form of communication that proposes a certain storytelling, values and elements representative of a certain culture balancing the need of localization, therefore adapting a content to a certain audience (Noris et al. 2020; Noris & Cantoni, 2021) with brand identity. Moreover, digital analytics will help bridging the research gap of most related

studies, which approach fashion films only from an outsider viewpoint, as acts of expressions, but being seldom able to assess their actual audiences.

Literature Review

The film industry since the twentieth century has played a key role in the promotion and representation of the fashion world. This has led several film scholars to devote particular attention to the confluence of fashion and film, studying and analyzing the role of cinema in the production, promotion, and representation of fashion, as well as its role in stimulating consumption and sales. Moreover, the relationship between film, media, and fashion studies has offered a valuable research potential, which is becoming increasingly of interest among researchers (Castaldo Lunden, 2018). Fashion and films present common and intertwining characteristics: both industries are to be considered among the most commercial ones and both use technologies in combination with performances, bodies, and cameras. Moreover, film costumes not only have taken inspiration from haute couture and fashion, but they have also inspired trends and fashions within the sector (Paulicelli, 2019). The birth of the fashion film genre can be traced back to the very emergence of cinema. According to Soloaga & Guerrero (2016), Uhlirova (2013) identified a film realized by Georges Méliès for *Mysthère corsets* as one of the first fashion films ever, while Evans (2001) cites Poiret as the first couturier to use a film of a mannequin parade to promote his fashions in 1991, even though it must be noted that both films were conceived as commercials.

Newsreel screenings made between the 1910s and 1930s, which presented the latest Parisian collections to American customers, could also be cited as forerunners of fashion films (Evans, 2001; Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). Short films became more and more popular over time: some simply presented the collections of a designer, while the main objective of others was to launch trends or present the production process or new fabrics such as nylon or rayon (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). Between the 1930s and 1950s the Golden Era of Hollywood had a strong impact on fashion newsreels thanks to actresses and stars such as Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Kathrine Hepburn, and Jean Harlow.

When it comes to the interplay among fashion and films, women casual clothing, which included pieces such as trousers, started to be adopted by the masses in the 1930s thanks to those Hollywood icons, who appeared for the first-time using riding and sailor trousers both in films and in their private lives (Cunningham, 2016; *anonymized for review*; Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). Among those who contributed to the development of fashion films, it is worth mentioning the photographer Erwin Blumenfeld, who is considered the pioneer of experimental fashion films during the 1950s and 1960s; William Klein and Guy Bourdin, who contributed short films to complement their photographic work between the 1960s and the 1980s; some famous fashion photographers, such as Richard Avedon, Serge Lutens and Helmut Newton, who proposed fashion films for commercial brands during the 1970s and 1980s (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). Moreover, among the precursors of fashion films as we know them today, according to Paulicelli (2019) also Fellini's production *Alta Società (High Society)* deserves a mention. In this commercial, Fellini advertises a particular Barilla pasta typology – rigatoni – through an elegant lady sitting in a French *haute cuisine* restaurant. The woman, after having listened to the waiter listing the menu, simply asks for a plate of rigatoni. Through this representation, Fellini shares in a sarcastic way what *Italianness* means for him from a culinary and language perspective. The request for rigatoni is a clear statement: Italian food in its simplicity is for the lady sexier and more appealing than the French one (Paulicelli, 2019).

Despite the frequent use of fashion films as a form of commercials, the genre has only recently become well-known and widely spread thanks to the advancements of digital technologies, which have simplified the production and amplified the dissemination of such movies (Khan, 2012; Uhlirova, 2013). The new genre of fashion films can be traced to the first decade of the 21st century, as a result of the digital revolution, which allowed fashion and high luxury brands to create a different form of expression, art, branding and a strong connection with their stakeholders, through forms of storytelling that promote their products and entertain their audiences while emphasizing values, heritage and quality (Jang & Yang, 2010; Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). Brands have discovered the advantages of fashion films and their power of seduction, as they allow their users to live a more engaged experience than classic TV advertising campaigns. Fashion films have inherited

the principles of traditional fashion media, but have added innovations in communication. In particular, according to Soloaga & Guerrero (2016): (i) fashion films are largely produced by luxury fashion companies to provide a new form of experience through entertainment via experiential marketing; (ii) they establish a more intimate relationship with consumers through the interactive possibilities of digital formats; (iii) they use storytelling and serialization among the most recurring tools to build brand engagement; (iv) they use beauty, balance, surprise and harmony as tools to strike the user through aesthetic pleasure; (v) fashion films on the one hand tend to dematerialize products and on the other hand can also make them become a real element with its own life and personality.

Among the most recent fashion films, which are offspring of the digital transformation of fashion communication, one can mention the 2016 Gucci fashion film wanted by Alessandro Michele, Gucci's creative director, to launch the new Guilty perfume. The film makes strong references to the atmosphere and style of the movie *Death in Venice* (1971). Also the 2017 Kenzo fashion film, wanted by its creative directors Carol Lim and Humberto Leon to launch their autumn-winter collection *Cabiria, Charity, Chastity* directed by Natascha Lyonne, makes clear reference to a film of the past: Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957). It tells the story of Chastity, who reconciles with her Vaudevillian past and is able to find the essence of life in a nonsensical world (*anonymized for review*). When it comes to collaborations, in 2017 the fast fashion brand H&M launched with the luxury brand Erdem the film *Secret Life of Flowers*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, in which the storytelling was composed by a love triangle, set in a mysterious country mansion where it was "always spring". A series to be mentioned within the fashion film category, is *Women's Tales*, an online series presented by Miu Miu in 2011, whose aim was both to do fashion branding, presenting fashion items through a feminine artistic eye, and to launch a feminist message (*anonymized for review*). Although one may think that fashion films have been widely studied and researched, it should be considered that the topic and the scenario related to them can be taken into analysis by considering different perspectives. Indeed, academic studies allow fashion films to be analyzed not only by taking into consideration their various facets and the different methodological approaches researchers can offer to analyze not only fashion, film, and media but also

issues that are intertwined with fields such as identity, status, ethnicities, cultures, and business practices (Castaldo Lunden, 2018).

Before presenting the research questions in detail, and the used methodology, the three fashion films belonging to *The Good Italian* saga are to be introduced and outlined.

The Three Episodes

The first episode of the film was launched on June 18, 2015 and is entitled *The Good Italian I 'The farmhouse of wonders'*. In the film, a couple of English tourists on a bicycle come across a small, dilapidated farmhouse in the countryside of Soragna, which reveals, behind the creaking door, the interior of a princely residence: the dining room of Prince Meli Lupi di Soragna, which contains some of the most important Baroque frescoes in northern Italy. The prince, played by actor Giancarlo Giannini, is very warm and friendly and welcomes the two tourists to his table, laden with “culatello” from the cellars of a well-known Italian producer (the Spigaroli brothers’ Antica Corte Pallavicina) and local wines from the cellar of a local restaurant in Soragna, La Stella D’Oro (IMDb, 2015; *The Good Italian*, n.d.). Seeing the inadequacy of the male guest’s suit to a Prince’s reception, the Prince asks his faithful butler Fefè to take care of the new guest, inviting him to the Prince’s dressing room so that he can put on an impeccably tailored blue suit. The final touch is the transformation of the guest, initially dressed in a cycling jacket and pants into a perfect ‘good Italian’ (IMDb, 2015; *The Good Italian*, n.d.).

In the second episode, *The Good Italian II 'The Prince goes to Milan'* launched on January 11, 2016, the Prince travels to Milan, to meet a mysterious lady who turns out to be his niece. Travelling in a prestigious Lancia Aurelia Spider B24, symbol of Italian design and industry in the world, he chooses the secret enclave that most closely resembles the atmosphere of the princely Rocca di Soragna: the Four Seasons Hotel. After a quick visit to the hotel’s Michelin-starred kitchen, the Prince realises that the basil in the kitchen is not up to the standard of the recipe the chef was supposed to prepare: trenette al pesto. Through a fictional film choice, the Prince goes to get the pesto himself in his garden in Soragna. After harvesting the basil, the prince goes to his suite and gets ready for dinner, finding the perfect dress to welcome his niece. The secret recipe and the atmosphere will

convert the young cosmopolitan woman, spoilt by the most clichéd frivolous luxuries, to the refined and simple pleasure offered by the Italian lifestyle (IMDb, 2016; *The Good Italian*, n.d.).

The third episode, for which the costume designer Lindy Hamming made the clothes, was launched on January 13, 2017. Here, Giancarlo Giannini in his role as the Prince of Soragna is absorbed in the usual ritual of shaving with the family barber, played by the real Prince of Soragna, Diofebo Meli Lupi. A close friend of him, the Italian tenor Vittorio Grigólo, arrives in a hurry to Naples and meets the Prince, who is of Neapolitan origin, and asks him for advice on the best rendering of the famous Neapolitan song *O Paese d'o Sole*. The tenor's difficulty is not technical but in finding the expressiveness and interpretative passion that has made this musical form derived from Italian melodrama. The Prince knows that the secret lies in the authenticity of the emotion expressed by the song, and only by immersing himself in the essence of Naples, a dramatic and at the same time enchanting place, will the tenor's voice be able to express its power. Accompanied by the faithful Fefé, who in this film is immersed in an amorous enchantment and in the silent search for ecstatic emotion, the Prince accompanies Grigólo on an immersion into the essence of being Neapolitan – the Gulf, the old squares, the noisy alleyways, the pizza fritta on the street corner, the lemons, the terrace of Posillipo with a view of Vesuvius... (IMDb, 2017; *The Good Italian*, n.d.).

According to Umberto Angeloni, former CEO of Caruso, the company chose to create the saga *The Good Italian* since it realized the importance of fashion films to communicate with its audience and the potential effectiveness of digital channels. Angeloni explains that Caruso's choice in the three episodes of the saga was to play with a balance between fictional and real elements: the places, characters, facts, objects, relationships, etc. are so exceptional and improbable, to require a willing suspension of disbelief, yet they are almost all true, but made of a (super)natural reality that is equally awe-inspiring, and therefore also makes fiction likely. Moreover, according to the interview and to the information provided, the reading key of both film directors Emanuele Di Bacco for the first two episodes and Adriano De Santis, director of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia of Rome, for the third movie, is fiction-real: the chef of

The Good Italian II is real, he is Vincenzo Mollica, as is the tenor of The Good Italian III, Vittorio Grigòlo, or the Prince of Soragna, who really exists and who in the third episode impersonates the Prince's barber. The actual and living Prince of Soragna has also real Neapolitan origins: his mother was a noblewoman of the Quaranta family.

Caruso for the realization of the three episodes has chosen to pay homage to literature and cinema. The title The Good Italian has been in fact, inspired by *The Dangerous Summer* by Ernest Hemingway (1959). As for Cinema references, in The Good Italian I and II, the table setting scenes are inspired by *Grand Budapest Hotel* directed by Wes Anderson in 2014. In the second film, the car trip from Soragna to Milan is inspired by *Il Sorpasso* with Vittorio Gassman directed by Dino Risi in 1962, also using the same car, a Lancia Aurelia Spider B24.

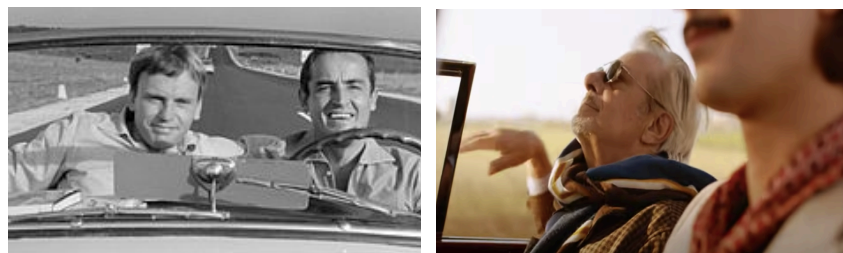


Figure 1. A scene from *Il Sorpasso* with Vittorio Gassman and *The Good Italian II* with Giancarlo Giannini

Another cinematic reference can be found in the preparation of the pesto, which contains a mixture of the magic laboratory of *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* directed by Peter Greenaway in 1989 and the perfect kitchen of *The Chef (Le Chef)* directed by Daniel Cohen in 2012, starring Jean Reno and Michaël Youn. In The Good Italian II, other cinematic references are related to the works of Fellini: for the creation of theatrical suspense with the atmosphere of the store and the dialogue with the mannequin inspired by *8½* (1963), the venture into the mysterious cave is instead inspired by *Roma* (1972). Finally, The Good Italian III takes inspiration from *L'oro di Napoli*, a 1954 episodic film directed by Vittorio De Sica. The fashion movie takes its cue from the episode titled *Pizze a Credito* in which Sofia Loren sells fried pizza which can be paid after eight days. The cinematographic choices focused on the concept of “Made in Italy” and on the Italian essence, explain through the three episodes what it means to be a “good

Italian”. Caruso has chosen to convey this message by collaborating with two Italian cinema directors, Emanuele Di Bacco and Adriano De Santis, and with mostly Italian actors who in one way or another were connected to the three episodes of the saga. Giancarlo Giannini who plays the Prince of Soragna has a direct connection with the real Prince, Diofebo Meli Lupi. The faithful Fefè is played by Emanuele Angeloni, son of the former CEO, Umberto Angeloni. Finally, in the second episode the chef of the Fours Season Vincenzo Mollica, as well as the tenor Vittorio Grigòlo in the third film did not play a simple role since they were impersonating themselves. Moreover, the brand consciously decided to keep all the dialogues in Italian. The films’ choices were not only well received by the public but also by the critics. The movies have been awarded by many fashion film festivals such as Berlin Fashion Film Festival, Fashion Film Festival Chicago, La Jolla Fashion Film Festival, London Fashion Film Festival, Miami International Film Festival, Sarajevo Fashion Film Festival as best actor, best casting, best cinematography, best director, best film, best music, best story.

Research Design & Methodology

This paper aims at answering two main research questions.

RQ1. How has the very topic of being a “Good Italian” been translated into the three fashion films?

To answer this question, a thematic analysis of the three films has been conducted, using a template analysis, which is a very flexible technique with few specified procedures, allowing researchers to tailor it to match the research requirements. The essence of this method is that the researcher produces a list of codes (‘template’) representing themes identified in textual data. Some of these themes have been defined *a priori*, but they have been modified and adapted according to how the researchers have read and interpreted the texts (King, 2004).

The codes determined *a priori* have been identified thanks to *Studia Imagologica* (Beller & Leerrssen, 2007), which identifies how national stereotypes emerge, what they are and to which extent they are determined by historical or ideological circumstances, or else by cultural, literary, or discursive conventions. Thanks to travel literature, one of the

main sources of the image of Italy in ethnographic, artistic, and political representations, five possible aspects that identify Italian-ness have been identified: (i) the sight of magnificent ruins and ancient statuary; (ii) religion; (iii) Italians' love for fine arts: thanks to great painters and architects such as Bramante and Palladio or as masters and virtuosos of music, such as Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Verdi; the very language of the Italians participated in their musicality, and they were often represented as warbling songwriters. (iv) The image of Italy is also an image of its landscapes. Some visual tropes have come to pre-program the stereotypes of modern tourism: Florence seen from Piazzale Michelangelo, the leaning tower of Pisa, the panorama of the city and gulf of Naples with Vesuvius in the background, the ruins of the Greek theatre of Taormina in the foreground of the coast and the distant Etna etc. (v) The image of the Italian: at the base of the stereotype there is a summary list of qualities, which imply that "the Italian is good, the Italian has genius, the Italian is lazy, anarchic, a classical character, a wise man, a laborer, a saint, a hero" (Bollati 1972: 951). Intuition, already formulated by Vincenzo Gioberti (1844: 105), who defines the Italian people as "a desire, not a fact; an assumption, not a reality".

To carry out such thematic analysis of the three fashion films, the first step was to transform the three videos into texts, describing in detail the contents of each film: places and environment, characters, objects, sounds and music, symbols, and logos, etc. Themes have been based on how meanings and their implications were constructed, on the historical, cultural, and sociological context of the films.

RQ2. How have the films been distributed, and which audiences did they reach?

In order to answer this question, we carried out an in-depth analysis of the information archived by Caruso regarding the launch of the three films, triangulating it with the information published on the various digital channels and with the interview.

Moreover, access to the digital analytics of the YouTube channel was granted by the company, allowing to get a "behind the scenes" understanding of the actual usages of the three fashion films. Such data have enabled to get a better understanding of their audiences. Finally, a semi-structured interview with the former Caruso's CEO, Umberto Angeloni, has provided both additional information to answer the above questions, as well

as the possibility of double-checking hypotheses and to get a better understanding of the role of such films as seen by the company: the interviewee was, in fact, the initiator and the “soul” of the studied case. A semi-structured interview aims, in fact, to complement the analysis of the textual, visual, and analytical components, since it allows the use of a mix of closed and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up questions about why or how, without slavishly adhering to verbal questions as in a standardized survey, thus delving into completely unforeseen themes (Adams, 2015).

Results and Discussion

RQ1: How has the very topic of being a “Good Italian” been translated into the three fashion films?

To answer the following question a template analysis has been carried out. Moving from the five preidentified codes above mentioned (the sight of magnificent ruins and ancient statuary; religion; Italians’ love for fine arts; the image of Italian landscapes; the image of the Italian character, which represents according to Beller & Lerrssen (2007) the Italian national character, we developed our template of codes retrieved both from the three fashion films and from the interview with Umberto Angeloni, interview through which we tried to understand how the interviewee constructed meaning.

To do the thematic analysis, the three videos were transformed into text and described in detail by the authors (description of the dialogues, environment, objects, scenes, colors, etc.) and the interview was transcribed. The following codes were identified:

- (i) Italians’ love for beauty: representation of fine arts such as music, in particular classical music, painting, architecture, sculpture but also cars, clothing and food; The three episodes are rich in references to the beauty of the arts, examples are in the first film the dining room of Prince Meli Lupi di Soragna, which contains some of the most important Baroque frescoes in northern Italy, as well as the representation of delicious foods and wines such as culatello di Soragna or wines from the Spigaroli brothers’ Antica Corte Pallavicina and from the cellar of a local restaurant in Soragna, *La Stella D’Oro*. In the second movie, we find the iconic car Lancia Aurelia Spider B24, symbol of Italian design and industry, the

passion for food, its preparation, and the choice of every single ingredient through the representation of trenette al pesto, a dish apparently simple but hiding a great tradition. In the third movie, we find once again the food with the tradition of fried pizza and the architecture of the city of Naples. All three episodes are also always accompanied by classical Italian music, for example, *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata* by Giuseppe Verdi (1843) and *O Paese d'o Sole* by Vincenzo D'Annibale and Libero D'Onorio (1925).

- (ii) The representation of Italian landscapes: examples are the countryside of Soragna, the city of Naples and the Parthenopean landscape.
- (iii) The sight of magnificent ruins, buildings, and ancient statuary: the external image of never-new period buildings and some in ruins or seemingly neglected: an example is the Soragna's mansion in the first episode, which from the outside looks crumbling but inside is majestic.
- (iv) The representation of the Italian character: the hand-kissing to the nephew, the treatment of the butler, the fact that the Prince remembers by heart the names of the Four Season employees, the idea of the Italian *savoir vivre*.
- (v) Idea of perfection. This concept is represented by two quotes made by the Prince in the second episode: "ah... a proposito deve essere tutto perfetto...", "ah... by the way everything must be perfect..." pronounced at minute 1.01 referring to his stay at The Four Seasons Hotel, and "Fefè è perfetto... questo...", "Fefè, it's perfect... this...", pronounced at minute 4.13 referring to the choice of the suite for the dinner.
- (vi) Indeterminacy of time. This concept is represented within the third episode through two quotes: "quando si cerca la perfezione il tempo non esiste", "when seeking perfection, time does not exist", pronounced by the Prince at 2.0 and repeated by Vittorio Grigòlo at minute 4.50.

Such ensemble of positive stereotypes can be summarized through the term "gooditalianism", for which Caruso also created a fictional dictionary entry:

gooditalianism\gʊdɪ-tal-yə-,ni-zəm\noun [neologism, derived from Caruso's movie series "The Good Italian"] can be defined as : (i) demeanor or behavior of a good Italian - *If you want to travel gaily, and I do, travel with good Italians* (Hemingway,"The Dangerous Summer", 1959); (ii) quality or characteristic of Italian people who display a higher level of culture, spirit and taste – *ultimately – is the art of being happy: the most difficult of all* (Stendhal); (iii) Italian lifestyle in its most authentic and refined expression – *is a manual written in twenty seven centuries* (anonymous); (iv) innate ability to detect and discern the absolute best in objects, occasions and cultures, and to re-elaborate and re-present them at a higher level; (v) the promotion of Italian excellences, heritage and ideals; (vi) mindset of people who share the same appreciation of Italy and Italians - *I dwell in*; (vii) specialized interest in or emulation of superior Italian qualities or achievements - *a man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority* (Samuel Johnson, 1791); (viii) holistic view of proper Italian personality, style and culture.

The moral of the episodes is that the authentic Italian lifestyle can be found in places with great history and local traditions and treasures, art, and craftsmanship. It can be experienced through a full immersion within Italian landscapes which are made by magnificent ruins, buildings, and ancient statuary and both by well-known places such as the city of Naples and the Parthenopean landscape but also by hidden places such as the countryside of Soragna. The authentic Italian lifestyle can be tasted in the representation of fine arts such as music, painting, architecture, sculpture but also cars, clothing, and food; and finally, it can be found in some positive stereotypes that represent Italians: friendliness, lightheartedness, the continuous search for perfection and the idea that time does not exist. For Caruso, being a "good Italian" and representing "Made in Italy" means not overdoing the spectacular and the excessive pomp and circumstance. Small details make the difference, since beauty can be found in simplicity: in the first episode, the prince's farmhouse, from the outside, makes us think of a ruin with little to offer inside, but once inside, it shows all its splendor despite its simplicity; in the second episode, the

car chosen for the trip from Soragna to the Four Seasons in its simple lines and design may not seem as valuable or luxurious as other more famous brands, the same can be said about the search for perfection in trenette al pesto, a quite easy dish someone might think not up to the kitchens of a hotel like the Four Seasons; in the third episode the Prince's choice to accompany the tenor Vittorio Grigòlo among the common people to take inspiration and to aspire to the best.

All this is reflected in what is the essence of the brand Caruso, its garments aspire to perfection, they are considered timeless, but they are not for everyone, in fact, only a careful and trained eye of a true connoisseur can grasp the true essence, as well as the true essence of a "good Italian". The choice of proposing this topic in the three episodes allowed Caruso to make its communication choices consistent with its brand identity, using some of the positive stereotypes used in literature and in the classics to describe Italy and Italians as an instrument.

RQ2. How have the films been distributed, and which audiences did they reach?

For Caruso, digital platforms were fundamental to launch the 3 fashion films. In particular, the choice fell on social media such as Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube, accompanied by digital channels of newspapers, fashion and film such as Fashion Channel, Fotogramas, La Repubblica, The Corner and for the second movie also The Four-Season Hotel channel, since the film was set there. Umberto Angeloni referred that Instagram had not been utilized as a distribution channel, since at the time of the launch of the three films it did not allow the upload of such long videos. In the following table, a synopsis of publication outlets is provided.

Table 1. Film views according to the main digital platforms in which it has been shared
(data provided by Caruso and retrieved end of September 2021)

Although the greatest echo of the three films is due to the digital channels used for their promotion, the premieres of each of the three episodes were launched respectively for The Good Italian I in the Caruso store in Milan, for The Good Italian II at the Four Seasons, with a lunch in the kitchens where the pesto scene took place and for The Good Italian III also in a room of the Four Seasons.-Caruso, to reach a larger audience also

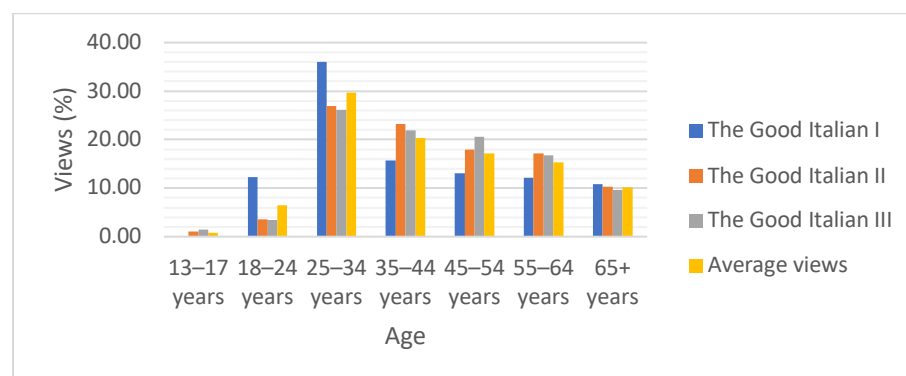
utilized co-marketing activities in collaboration with some of the brands that were present in the three films, such as the Four Season, Spigaroli or Proraso. In addition, for the launch of the first film, a promotion was made on the Ask Andy's Style Discussion forum (www.askandyaboutclothes.com) in which a prize was also offered for the best comment on the film.

The three fashion films had a great echo and were highly appreciated on social media channels, especially on Facebook. On Facebook, in fact, the three fashion films have been shared by various pages and personalities, here are some of the most significant re-shares. The Good Italian I was shared by the Dress My City page with over 8.000 views and by other pages such as Italia Pretiosa, Gentleman Style of Life and Plaza Uomo. The Good Italian II was also shared by Dress My City with 20.000 views, by the Four Seasons Hotel, which has also undertaken a collaboration and targeted promotion with Caruso to benefit from the movie, by ICFE Canada and by Plaza Uomo. The second episode had its world preview at Pitti Uomo. Among the accounts that have shared the film the Good Italian III on Facebook are several pages/people celebrating the city of Naples and Campania region including PassioNapoli with over 22.000 views, Artisti & Comici Made in Napoli with over 60.000, Napoliammore and Regno delle Due Sicilie with over 4.000 views each and Salvatore Cacace's page, where it has reached over 4 million views and over 4.500 comments.

From the information provided by Caruso up to now more than three hundred articles have been published about the three movies. Among the major on- and offline magazines and newspapers that have talked about the three films are Esquire, FMAX, Frankfurter Allgemeine, GQ, Il Corriere della Sera, Il Giornale, Il Sole 24 Ore, La Repubblica, L'Officiel, Panorama, Vogue, etc. Using an external consultancy company, Caruso estimated the editorial value of each episode. For The Good Italian I the editorial value was of almost 384.000 euros (132.919 coming from printed media and 251.000 from digital media). For the second episode the editorial value has been estimated to € 454.594. For The Good Italian III the editorial value is estimated at almost 290.000 euros, of which 144.993 come from printed media and 145.000 from digital media. Umberto Angeloni reported that according to the former director of the Milan store after the second episode

many customers went into the shop asking for the same pieces of clothing. According to the YouTube analytics collected on 22.11.2021, the three films were respectively viewed on YouTube 497'780, 1'008'903, 966'058 times, on average the first film was viewed for about 3'07'' the second one for 2'23'', and the third one for 3'08''. On average, 51% of the first film was viewed, 36% of the second, and 35% of the third. Such average lengths of viewing are particularly notable and indicate a major interest on the side of the viewers. According to StrikeSocial (2018), the average view rate of video ads in the fashion industry is 43%: hence percentages above 50% or 30% for films whose duration is much longer – respectively 6'08'', 6'40'' and 8'58'' – are to be considered very high.

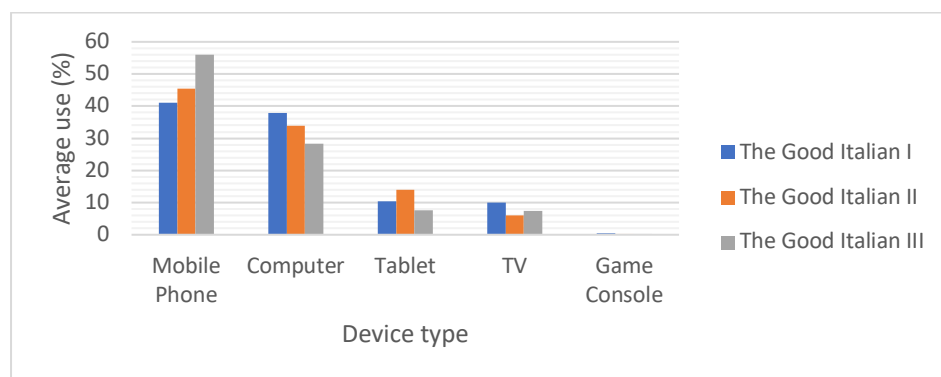
The fact that the % decreases for the second and the third episodes is likely due to – as we will see below – those episodes had been promoted also through advertising campaigns within YouTube. One can argue that some of the people reached by such campaigns have watched the films just for a short time, hence reducing the average viewing time. The ten countries with the highest number of views, adding up all three films, are Italy (18.08%), USA (12.43%), Great Britain (7.01%), Germany (4.89%), Brazil (1.82%), Canada (1.67%), India (1.58%), Russia (1.35%), Spain (1.21%), Argentina (1.09%), France (1.05%), Australia (1.02%). This is full in line with the main actual and intended markets of the company; it should be noted, however, that YouTube is not legally accessible, as other social media, from Mainland China. In terms of age and number of views, the 25-34 age group had the highest average number of views with 29.70%, followed by the 35-44 age group with 20.27% and the 45-54 age group with 17.22%. The 55-64 and 65+ age groups averaged 15.35% and 10.23% of views respectively. Finally, the sum of the views by people up to 24 years was 7.24% (Graph 1).



Graph 1. Average number of views of The Good Italian according to age range

Such distribution provides a quite likely image of the age cohorts relevant for the company. As far as viewers' gender is concerned, the analytics show that about 91% of the views came from male, in line with the very nature of a menswear brand. As far as the average duration of views is concerned, the data about men and women is similar: men watched an average of 34% of the three films, while women watched 31%. YouTube analytics show how Caruso's cinematic choice to use the concept of "Made in Italy" and to be a "good Italian" as the fil rouge of the three episodes has led the brand to reach different audiences both in terms of age groups but also in terms of countries, crossing possible cultural barriers.

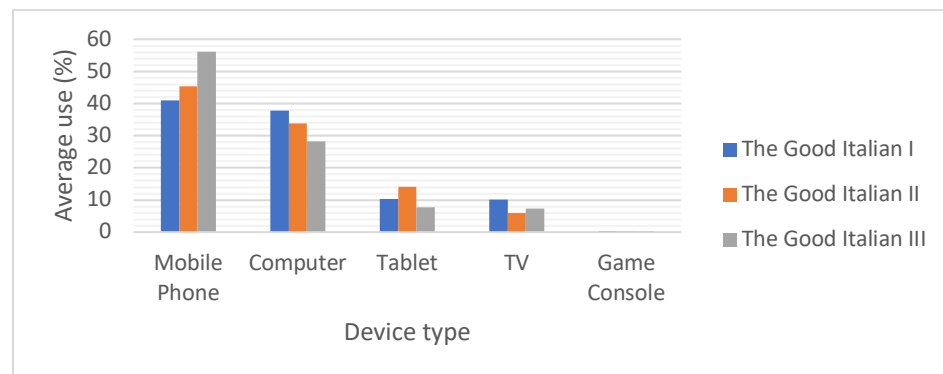
Graph 2 presents the top ten traffic sources of the episodes. The category "suggested video" is of considerable relevance for all three episodes. Few YouTube advertising activities have been done for The Good Italian I (accounting for 2.6% of the views), while for The Good Italian II and The Good Italian III the views coming from YouTube advertising are respectively 31.38% and 26.68%. All other views are to be considered organic. Due to the lack of similar information from other fashion films/companies – the openness of the company in sharing such data is so far very unique – no comparison can be done considering paid vs. organic views. However, when it comes to overall views, it can be said that The Good Italian series had very good results in terms of reach.



Graph 2. Traffic sources.

The last graph (Graph 3) shows which devices were the most used to watch the three fashion films. In general, it can be noted that the most used type of device is the

mobile phone, followed by computer, tablet, TV and game console. From the graph the use of mobile phones increased significantly between the first and third film while the use of computers to watch the three movies has decreased. Tablet usage increased with the second film launched in 2016 but it significantly decreased in the third movie.



Graph 3. Device type choice

Conclusions, limitations and further studies

Although the importance of the cultural localization of contents in both geographic and temporal terms is an aspect that does not leave fashion brands indifferent (Noris et al. 2020; Noris & Cantoni, 2021), the present study shows how it is possible to balance the localization strategy of a fashion brand with a brand identity-conscious communication, able to represent the brand's culture of origin at a global level. The choice of proposing in the three episodes the concept of “the good Italianism” and the idea of “Made in Italy” using stereotypes about Italy deriving from literature has allowed Caruso to make its communication choices consistent with its brand identity and to use traits and characteristics typical of a certain people and culture, in this case Italy, to communicate on a global level with different audiences. The economic investment for each film of about 150'000 euros brought interesting results in terms of reached audience, as can be seen from the analytics, in fact, not only the company was able to reach its markets of reference in terms of age, country and gender, but it was also able to attract heterogeneous audiences intrigued by the film choices, the content proposed and, in some cases, redirected through

paid advertisement. Moreover, the three films, years after their publication, continue to show a certain resilience and seem to still be of interest to the public.

In conclusion, the case shows that thanks to the intertwining of fashion films and digitalization, brands can create a strong image of their identity in the minds of their stakeholders. Caruso's case study does not only confirm what Soloaga & Guerrero (2016) asserted, namely that regarding luxury brands, fashion films can be used to strengthen the brand image, precisely through the communication of their heritage, creating an aspiration and desire to belong, but also demonstrates that fashion films can aspire to become communicative models capable of crossing spatial and temporal barriers, thanks to the diffusion on digital channels. Fashion movies can also break down cultural barriers thanks to messages that convey values belonging to their brand and culture, in this case for Caruso the Italian culture, playing on positive stereotypes without falling into banal or offensive representations. Moreover, this study, which presents both a qualitative and quantitative analysis, provides a 360-degree perspective of the state of the art of fashion films in the digital era, although, the fact that the analysis takes into account only Caruso could be considered as a limitation. Future research could, therefore, expand the sample and study how other companies belonging to the fashion world use fashion films and digital channels to communicate with their audience, ideally being able to approach the topic in a comparative fashion.

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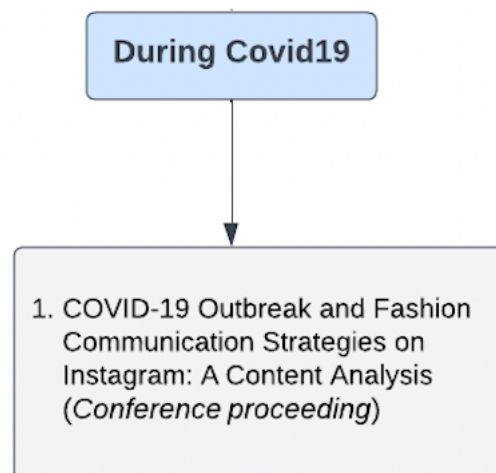
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12. COVID-19 Outbreak and Fashion Communication Strategies on Instagram: A Content Analysis ⁵⁷



⁵⁷ The paper is part of *The series Lecture Notes in Computer Science (LNCS)* published online on 3 July 2021 and presented at the 10th International Conference in Design, User Experience, and Usability: Design for Contemporary Technological Environments, (DUXU), 2021, held as Part of the 23rd HCI International Conference, HCII 2021, Virtual Event, July 24–29, 2021.

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**Fig. 13: PhD Thesis Design - COVID-19 Outbreak and Fashion Communication
Strategies on Instagram: A Content Analysis**

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Abstract. The COVID-19 outbreak took place end of 2019 in Wuhan city in China, and since then, it has spread across the world. The virus has not only impacted the health of millions of citizens, since, in such a globalized and interconnected system, it has also impacted on human being's daily life and activities. In this context, the volatility of the global economy has led many companies to modify and readapt their communication and marketing strategies and the fashion sector has not been exempted from these changes aimed at further engaging customers and at encouraging sales on e-commerce platforms.

The present paper aims to provide an overview of the communication strategies on Instagram by fashion companies during an exogenous crisis, such as the first Covid19 wave, in a period that goes from January until end of May 2020.

The research seeks to determine if and when the selected companies reacted on their Instagram accounts to the first wave of the pandemic, and which were the contents and the topics proposed across the considered period.

The goal of the research is to present the state of the art of digital fashion contents offered during a period of crisis such as a global pandemic, where many fashion companies have decided to change their marketing and communication strategies to rebalance their usual conversational Instagram “tone of voice” with the needs and feelings of their stakeholders. It also aims to set the ground for further academic discussions on issues related to human computer interaction limits and potentials, when it comes to establishing alternative communication and marketing strategies during crises, such as the Covid19.

Keywords: Covid19 · Digital fashion · Fashion companies · Fashion communication · Instagram

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak took place end of December 2019 in Wuhan city in China [1], since then, the pandemic has spread across the world reaching, as in the week from 9th to 16th November 2020, 3'977'223 confirmed cases and 59'699 deaths [2]. But Covid19 spread has not only affected the health and the wellbeing of millions of people, its impact goes beyond its morbidity and mortality, since, in such an internationalized and inter-connected planet, it has also deeply affected people's lives and habits across the whole world. According to Fernandes [3], the global economy and all the financial markets have experienced a fall due to the Covid19 pandemic and also due to the restrictive measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus, such as business interruptions, shutdowns and lockdowns. Furthermore, the volatility of the global economy has touched levels similar or even higher to the 2008/2009 financial crisis [4]. The pandemic, due to this uncertainty of economies, caused by the (potential) loss of jobs, by the stops of production and of the supply and distribution chains, has led many companies to modify and readapt their communication and marketing strategies to better meet people new situation and needs. Fashion companies have not been exempted from the impact of the pandemic, and according to McKinsey report [5], to survive Covid19, fashion executives and business leaders had to reinvent and still are trying to re-image the industry. Public health concerns have led many governments across the world to adapt social distancing measures and to require the closure of non-essential retail activities, such as also fashion. After the closure, many fashion companies pivoted their activities online and have started a series of social campaigns to fundraise for local and international communities and to help people across the world to survive the pandemic [6]. They also have put in place new business strategies, in order to further engage customers and to encourage sales on e-commerce platforms and on retail, despite the critical and delicate situation [7].

Such social distancing measures and lockdowns have underlined the increasing importance of well-designed social media strategies across the whole fashion value chain and have emphasized the inconsistency and narrowness of standardized human computer interaction (HCI) strategies, when it comes to face unexpected situations or events such as the current pandemic [8, 9].

During the Covid19 first wave, fashion companies on social media platforms showed different reactions to the spread of the pandemic, both in terms of timing and of contents provided. Some companies did not react immediately – be it due to an explicit decision or to a lack of preparedness – others, instead, decided to respond by proposing new contents to better attune with their customers, by showing to their audiences' higher levels of empathy and closeness.

The present paper aims to provide a first preliminary overview of the communication put in place by fashion companies across a period that goes from the spread of the pandemic on January, until May 2020. In order to provide this overview, the research seeks to determine (i) if and (ii) when the selected sample of fashion companies reacted on their Instagram accounts to the first wave of the pandemic; and (iii) which are the contents and the topics proposed across the whole considered period.

The first part of the analysis has been dedicated to determining if fashion companies adapted their Instagram communication during the first wave of Covid19 pandemic and, if yes, their timing. The following part of the study, developed through a content analysis, aims to determine which have been the main topics proposed on Instagram by fashion companies during the period that goes from the first Coronavirus related post on each company Instagram profile (if any) until May 31, 2020.

The aim of the study is to investigate the state of the art of the digital communication strategies adopted by fashion brands during a period of global crisis. It seeks also to lay the foundation for further academic exchanges and reflections on aspects connected with human computer interaction limits and potentials, when it comes to set and propose

alternative communication and marketing solutions in contingency and disruptive situations, such as the Covid19 one, that forced societies and communities to extensively and deeply reorganize people's lives and habits.

2 Literature Review

Human Computer Interaction (HCI) activities, broadly concerned with the design of instruments and tools that support and assist not only computer-mediated interactions between human and computers but also computer mediated interactions that occur among groups and individuals, especially after the birth of internet [10, 11] have more and more often an impact on people's and companies' everyday activities and habits. Among technologies that have most widely spread across the world by exploiting the intertwining between HCI and internet there are social media, which have been able to exploit the spread of the internet and through the years have incorporated some HCI principles [12, 13].

Despite such an increasing interest in social media studies from a technical and informatics point of view, still little academic research has been done on how companies should interact with these tools in order to increase marketing and communication performances [14].

Social media platforms offer a wide range of opportunities to companies through reduced costs, the enhancement of brand awareness and the increase of sale incomes [10]. According to recent studies, social networks have become one of the most popular digital activities across the whole world and in 2020 over 3.6 billion people were using these platforms, a number which is expected to grow up to 4.12 billion by 2023 [15]. Through social media platforms, companies do not only promote their products through advertising campaigns, but they also use them as valuable sources to know more about customers' preferences and opinions [16].

However, while social networks are perceived as a valuable tool for marketing and communication activities, many questions still remain open concerning the most effective

techniques for companies to present their contents and to communicate with their audiences in such an interactive, intimate as well as public, colloquial domain [17]. Furthermore, by using social media (blogs, social networks and online communities), consumers not only have discussions, share opinions and thoughts but also determine and reconsider which items are significant for them also in terms of brands relationships [18]. Brands in such environment have become facilitators of these social interactions by contributing to make all the stakeholders not external to their activities on these platforms, and making them active participants to the co-creation of the brand image and reputation, and of its economic value [18].

Moreover, social media popularity is increasingly growing, and managers are called to strike the right balance in order to define a coherent and cohesive online presence and to present the adequate “tone of voice” to their audiences [17]. Some experts argue that brands should utilize a more human tone of voice on social networks [17], others suggest that companies that succeed in social media are those which have maximized their abilities to tailor contents, language and tone according to whether the audience is a consumer, a prospect, supporter or a detractor, and others expects brands to adopt a traditional corporate communication style [19].

2.1 Crisis Communication

The value of a properly designed social media communication has been also emphasized by crises, that companies are constantly called to face in such an interconnected digital environment [20]. According to Dubrowski [21] a company crisis can be described as a short-term, unsought, adverse and critical situation within a company, which could be derived from both endogenous and exogenous variables, and which can put at risk the existence and the development of the company itself.

From a communication perspective within the fashion environment, a crisis can impact the whole company life cycle. The Rana Plaza and the Bravo Textile case as well as the Dolce & Gabbana’s Chopsticks Backlash, the Gucci blackface sweater and the H&M’s

‘coolest monkey’ jumper, are just some examples of endogenous crisis, which have involved fashion companies and that have demonstrated that this sector is not exempt from such crises, which not only impact business and production, but also communication strategies [22, 23]. Each of these companies was, in fact, called to face these crises also from a digital point of view by preparing *ad-hoc* social media strategies, in order to reduce the loss of credibility and to address criticisms [22, 23]. Also, exogenous crises, although not directly depending on fashion companies’ choices, deeply impact on the communication strategies of the brands themselves, especially when it comes to a not fully “controlled” media [24]. In 2020, social media strategies have been, in fact, disrupted by the spread of Covid19 pandemic, which has had a strong impact on people social lives, including their time and practices on social media themselves [25]. To face such situation, many fashion brands had to rethink and adapt their communication and marketing strategies to keep engaging their audiences.

3 Research Design

To develop the present research, a content analysis has been performed, since according to the literature it allows an in-depth analysis and a detailed focus on social, cultural, environmental aspects of fashion on social media platforms [26]. Instagram has been identified as the preferred platform to analyze Coronavirus related contents provided by fashion brands, since, from one side, it is placed at the sixth place among the most popular social networks as for July 2020, considering the number of active users [27], and on the other, this platform is a highly visual medium, and it is among the preferred social media platforms by fashion brands, since it easily allows them to present their contents and products [28].

The content analysis has been realized considering the first 25 strongest retail brands (in US dollars) out of 500, listed by brandirectory.com [29], who evaluated retail brands according to the following criteria: overall brand value, marketing investment, familiarity, loyalty, staff satisfaction, and corporate reputation (see Table 1). The 25 brands represent 10 different countries: China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland,

UK, USA and 6 different typologies of fashion retail businesses: Casual, Jewelry, Luxury, Sportswear, Underwear and Watches.

Three main research questions have been defined:

- Did fashion brands considered the pandemic within their contents provided on Instagram during the first Coronavirus wave?
- If yes, when have fashion companies started to keep into consideration the pandemic within their Instagram contents?
- Which kind of Covid19 related content did fashion companies provided?

4 Methodology

The study has been performed using a qualitative content analysis as research methodology, and only textual contents have been considered both on the captions and on the images, when available.

The analysis has been performed from December 5th to December 12th, 2020, and it collects all the posts published on Instagram by each selected fashion brand starting from the first Covid19 directly or not directly related post up to May 31st, 2020. A total of 1'758 Instagram posts has been collected (in the two cases in which no Covid related posts were found, no post has been included in the analysis).

In order to investigate the main contents related to Covid19 published by fashion brands the following research protocol has been designed. To analyze posts the English language has been used, which is the language mainly used by fashion brands in their Instagram communication strategies. When English was not available the coders have translated each post in English. The first part of the analysis was aimed to detect whether and when fashion brands posted the first content related to Coronavirus.

In order to measure the preparedness of each company, the simple indication of the date in which the first Covid19-related post has been published, has not appeared as a convincing solution. In fact, the Coronavirus crisis has affected different countries in different ways and times. To take this into account, several approaches have been considered. Using data people tested positive, or about death cases, or about lockdowns or other political decisions seemed to be problematic, because the comparability of such data across different countries appeared very limited. In the end, the Google Trend tool has been used.

This tool provides the frequency of searches of given keywords according to selected timeframes and geographical areas. It does not provide actual numbers of queries performed on Google, but it indicates when the highest number has occurred, giving it the standard value of 100, and plots the relative values of researches for other periods. The peak day for the “Coronavirus” Google searches, within the studied period and in the countries where the studied companies are headquartered, has been used as the reference point. It has been assumed as a proxy to indicate people awareness of the issue and interest in it. In fact, similar search data have powered the Google Flue Trends service, which since 2008 has provided a quite likely proxy to the actual flue prevalence in the USA and in other countries. In 2013, however, it appeared biased and not precise, because people started to search for flu-related keywords even without being directly affected: social interest and concerns related with flue biased health-related measures [30, 31] up to the point that the service was eventually closed in 2015. However, for the goal of this research, such search-related measure appears to be relevant and unbiased: we might assume that in the peak day communication teams within the studied companies could not ignore the Coronavirus issue and should have been aware of its major relevance for their audiences.

Once determined whether Covid19 has found a place among Instagram posts by fashion brands during the first pandemic wave, and when, a content analysis has been performed.

First, Covid related posts (#880) have been distinguished into two different categories: “Directly Covid Related” (DCR) and “Non-Directly Covid Related” (NDCR). DCR posts

(#612) are those posts where the reference to the pandemic is explicit, while NDCR posts (#268) are those posts where it was possible to see a reference to Covid but could also have been written in a non-Covid situation. For instance, posts suggesting make-up tutorials at home: they could refer to people confined at home because of lockdowns but could have been proposed also as general make-up recommendations in a non-pandemic situation.

The remaining “Non Covid Related” (NCR) are those posts (#878) that make no reference at all to the pandemic.

Then, to analyze the different typologies of posts, a codebook has been designed with a mixed, both top-down and bottom-up approach, to ensure thematic saturation. Although it was possible, in some cases, to identify within a post more than one topic, it has been decided to assign each post to only a category, the one that appeared dominant in the post itself. Table 2 presents such codes.

5 Results and Discussion

Hereafter, results are presented and discussed according to the three research questions.

5.1 Did Fashion Brands Consider the Pandemic Within Their Contents Provided on Instagram During the First Coronavirus Wave?

In relation with the first research question, which was aimed to understand whether fashion brands considered the pandemic within their contents provided on Instagram during the first Coronavirus wave, it is possible to state that 23 brands out of 25 (directly or indirectly) mentioned the pandemic situation within their posts. Two companies – Omega and Rolex, headquartered in Switzerland – never covered the pandemic in their posts, most probably to stay consistent with an image of timelessness and of strength, which is able to overcome all obstacles.

5.2 If Yes, When Have Fashion Companies Started to Keep into Consideration the Pandemic Within Their Instagram Contents?

Concerning the second research question, aimed to understand when fashion companies started to consider Coronavirus in their Instagram posts, Table 1 offers an overview on the analyzed items.

	Country	Google Trends peak day (GTP)	Day of the first Covid-related Post (FCP)	Days between GTP & FCP	Total # of posts	Total # of Covid-related posts
Anta	China	25.01.2020	13.04.2020	79	33	13
Chow Tai Fook			09.03.2020	44	27	5
Cartier	France	15.03.2020	04.04.2020	20	36	15
Chanel			29.03.2020	14	95	49
Dior			20.03.2020	5	174	92
Hermes			24.04.2020	40	32	7
Louis Vuitton			20.03.2020	5	83	74
Adidas	Germany	22.03.2020	18.03.2020	-4	32	30
Armani	Italy	23.02.2020	16.03.2020	22	128	14
Gucci			24.03.2020	30	157	95
Prada			11.04.2020	48	68	8
Ray-Ban			27.04.2020	64	24	15
Uniqlo	Japan	25.03.2020	27.03.2020	2	42	23
Zara	Spain	12.03.2020	01.04.2020	20	63	6
H&M	Sweden	12.03.2020	18.03.2020	6	92	72
Omega	Switzerland	13.03.2020	—	—	—	—
Rolex			—	—	—	—
Burberry	UK	16.03.2020	28.03.2020	12	113	47
Coach	USA	15.03.2020	17.03.2020	2	116	62
Levi's			17.03.2020	2	131	70
Nike			15.03.2020	0	5	3
Ralph Lauren			18.03.2020	3	70	46
The North Face			17.03.2020	2	52	36
Tiffany			18.03.2020	3	90	39
Victoria's Secret			17.03.2020	2	95	59
<i>Total</i>					<i>1'758</i>	<i>880</i>
<i>Average</i>		<i>8.03.2020*</i>	<i>25.03.2020</i>	<i>18.3</i>		

Table 1. Analyzed companies, ordered by headquarters' country

*While 8.03.2020 is the average of the dates listed in the table, 16.03.2020 it the peak day for the “Coronavirus” keyword at the global level, in the period 01.01/31-05-2020.

Comparing the temporal reaction of the first Covid19 related post for each brand with the corresponding Google Trend peak date for each headquarter country, it is possible to observe that 12 brands (Adidas, Coach, Dior, H&M, Levi's, Louis Vuitton, Nike, Ralph Lauren, The North Face, Tiffany, Uniqlo and Victoria's Secret) adapted their communication strategy to the pandemic within maximum 10 days or even earlier than the Google Trend Search peak; 4 brands (Burberry, Chanel, Cartier and Zara) took between 11 and 20 days to adapt their contents to the Covid19 situation. Two brands (Armani and Gucci) took between 21 and 30 days to mention the pandemic for the first time within their Instagram accounts, while one brand (Hermes) mentioned Covid19 between 31 and 40 days after the Google trend peak of its country. Two brands (Chow Thai Fook and Prada) mentioned the Covid19 situation between 41 and 50 days after each Country related Google Trend peak date. Finally, two brands (Anta and Ray Ban) took more than 51 days to refer to the pandemic.

Results show that among the countries that host 2 or more headquarters of the considered brands, USA brands are the ones that reacted more promptly, taking on average 2 days to react to the pandemic. French brands took nearly 17 days to mention the pandemic while the Italian ones took nearly 41 days to consider it and the Chinese ones 62 days. Concerning the German, Japan, Spanish, Swedish and UK brands they took respectively, -4, 2, 20, 6, 12 days to react to the pandemic.

We could assume, however, that many international brands preferred to consider the international environment more than their national one, which is consistent with the use of English language also by those headquartered in countries where it is not the national language. From this perspective, which assumes March 16th, 2020, as the global Google Trends peak for Coronavirus, it can be noted that USA brands are, once again, the ones that reacted more promptly, taking on average 1 day to react to the pandemic. Chinese brands took nearly 11 days to mention the pandemic, while the French ones took nearly 16 days to consider it, and the Italian ones 19 days on average. Concerning the German, Japan, Spanish, Swedish and UK brands, they took respectively 2, 11, 16, 2, 12 days to react to the pandemic. A special caveat needs to be done about Chinese brands: Google

usages are not representative of China because of censorship, for the same reason making a reference to the pandemic might have been a problem for those companies.

5.3 Which Kind of Covid19 Related Content Did Fashion Companies Provide?

As for the last research question, aimed to understand which kind of Covid19 related contents fashion companies provided on Instagram to communicate with their audience during the first wave of pandemic, results are summarized in Table 2.

Code	Description	<i>DCR</i> + <i>NDCR</i>	<i>DCR</i>	<i>NDCR</i>	<i>NCR</i>	Tot. #
Activities	Proposal of activities to entertain audience	260	189	71	56	316
Product advertisement	Advertisement of products or services with or without reference to the pandemic and its consequences	119	42	77	457	576
Brand representation & storytelling	Contents related to the storytelling of the brand both with a reference or without to Covid19	89	41	48	118	207
Empathy & closeness	Messages of closeness, empathy in relation to the pandemic	75	72	3		75
Positive vibes	Messages of hope, happiness, and good wishes	67	60	7		67
Stay in contact	Direct questions or imperatives utilized by fashion brands to involve and engage audience	58	33	25	10	68
Stay at home	Expressions that relate to the life at home	56	53	3		56
Aid initiatives	Voluntary offers of help from brands to overcome the pandemic	40	40			40
Closing/Opening information	Information relating to the closure/opening of the stores	24	21	3		24

Festivities & Events	Reference to the celebrations of festivities and events both Covid19 or non Covid19 related (ex. Earth Day, Mother's Day, Anniversaries, Birthdays, etc.)	22	11	11	83	105
Press	Information about the brand presence on the press	12	3	9	56	68
Health & Safety	Messages related to the importance of keeping people safe by adopting measures and by sharing information	11	10	1		11
Patriotism	Expressions related to the motherland	7	4	3		7
Thankful to collaborators	Expressions of gratefulness to all the employees that were engaged during the pandemic	7	7			7
(New) Projects & collaborations	Presentation of projects and collaborations with other entities, brands, or stars	6	3	3	38	44
Togetherness	Expressions related to the possibility to overcome the pandemic together	6	5	1		6
Daily life	References to the daily activities that have changed due to Coronavirus	5	4	1		5
Thankful to heroes	Expressions of gratefulness to all the people that work against the pandemic	5	5			5
Contact	Brands remind their audience that their webpages/social media accounts are actives to assist customers	3	1	2		3
Home working	Expressions used to highlight the condition related to the home working	3	3			3
Initiatives for women	Support for gender equality, women empowerment with reference or not to pandemic	3	3		2	5
Logistic	Technical information related to product purchase and delivery	1	1			1
Sustainability	Information related to the development of sustainable products and to the promotion of sustainable initiatives	1	1		34	35
Black Lives Matter	Support to the movement Black Lives Matter and to activities against racism				7	7

Tips	Recommendations related to the use of products and to the possible activities to do with them				6	6
Personalization	Information related to the possibility to personalize products				5	5
In memory of...	Remembrance of dead people				4	4
Made In...	Expressions related the idea and to the concept of “Made In”				1	1
Reviews	Request to provide reviews to the products				1	1

Table 2. Codebook for DCR, NDCR and NCR posts. Categories are listed according to the frequency of Covid related posts (if not applicable, according to the overall number of posts).

Due to the fact that both DCR and NDCR posts could be referred to the Pandemic, and in many cases NDCR acquired a fuller meaning due to such a context (hence they were quite likely interpreted as such by their audiences), all their codes have been eventually combined. Doing so, a thematic classification of the topics according to four main categories has emerged: “Active Reaction to Pandemic”, “Brand Reputation & Image”, “Closeness to the Audience” and “Marketing” (Fig. 1).

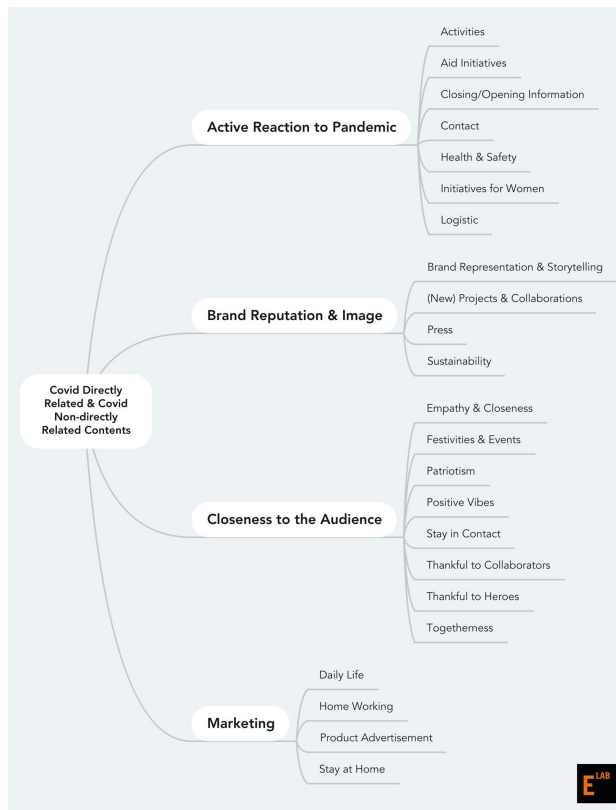


Fig. 1. Four main categories of DCR and NDCR posts.

The category “Active Reaction to Pandemic”, according to the present classification, encompasses all those contents provided by fashion companies that relate to concrete reactions to fight or to help people during Coronavirus pandemic, through activities proposed to the followers to entertain them, to advise them about the health and safety current regulations, through aid initiatives in order to provide money/materials/support to hospitals, associations and to women empowerment, and through the sharing of useful information for customers such as the closure or opening of physical shops due to Covid19, logistic and contact information to support the purchase and the delivery of products through their online platforms such as e-commerce and social media.

The category “Brand Reputation & Image” includes instead all those codes, whose main aim is to promote a positive image of the company during the pandemic in front of its stakeholders. It encompasses codes that refer to the brand history, storytelling, and general

representation. It also encompasses the launch or the promotions of new projects and collaborations, of sustainable activities and products, with the aim to further strengthen the image and the reputation of the brands. The category also includes the press representation of the brand and the interviews proposed on media, such as fashion magazines (Marie Claire, Harper's Bazar, Vogue, etc.).

The category "Closeness to the Audience" encompasses all those codes that relate to expressions of closeness to brand's audience, referring both to internal and external stakeholders, through the sharing of messages of hope, empathy, love, happiness, togetherness, patriotism and through a communication made of direct questions to further engage the followers. Furthermore, it includes the code related to festivities and events, through which companies share their closeness and celebrate anniversaries and festivities such as Easter, the Mother's Day, the Earth Day etc. This category also encompasses codes that share gratitude towards all those people that with their work and efforts have been engaged with the fight against Covid19, both within fashion companies, such as employees working to produce masks and medical gowns and outside fashion companies, such as all the medical and first aid staff engaged to save lives.

The last category, which has been named "Marketing", refers to all those codes, that promote marketing strategies referring more or less directly to the pandemic. It includes posts that cover products, making reference to daily life, that has changed due to Covid19, and all the posts which are referred to product/service promotion, referring to the home working condition and to the necessity of staying and being at home. Finally, the present category includes the code called "Product Advertisement", that encompasses all those posts of product advertisement, which generally refer to some aspects of the pandemic such as the fact of being in quarantine, the lack of direct human relations, the lack of nature within people's life, and of outdoor sport activities.

6 Conclusions, Limitations, and Further Work

The objectives of the paper were to propose a first analysis in order to understand whether, when and through which contents, fashion brands have adapted their online communication strategy to face a situation of exogenous crisis such as the Coronavirus pandemic.

Despite the importance recognized to the digital communication within the fashion environment both from academics and practitioners [32], and to the fact that social media popularity is growing, and that practitioners are called to determine the right balance to promote a proper online presence and to present the adequate brand “tone of voice” [17] not all the companies analyzed have adapted their contents and their communication strategies to the Covid19.

The content analysis has revealed that during the first wave of the pandemic out of 1’758 analyzed posts, 880 were referred to Covid19. Although the global Google Trend peak of the search of the word “Coronavirus” is on March 16, 2020 the average date according to each first Covid related post publication is March 25, and on average, companies took nearly 18 days to post the first Covid related content. Furthermore, data show that less than half brands (12) reacted to the pandemic within 10 days from the Google Search Peak for each related country, 2 brands never reacted and 11 took between 19 and 79 days to mention it.

The paper shows the limits and the challenges that HCI still needs to face when it comes to face unexpected situations such as a global pandemic, which not only has increased the use of digital tools, but it has also changed the attitude of the stakeholders towards them.

Furthermore, the research shows that among the companies that have decided to adapt their contents addressing the topic of the pandemic, most of them emphasized the sense of closeness and empathy with their stakeholders.

The present paper has also some limitations: at first instance the research only considers 25 fashion companies, more extensive researches are needed to enlarge the sample. Moreover, the present study considers 10 countries, and the sample taken into account

mainly refers to luxury brands, therefore, further studies are needed in order to amplify both the sample of countries and the typology of companies.

From a social media studies perspective, the analysis only considers one social media, Instagram, and therefore more extensive researches are required also on other platforms; in addition, the research does not consider for the content analysis visual elements of the Instagram posts, such as videos and images, unless containing textual elements.

In conclusion, further studies are required to also consider the direct experience of marketing and communication managers, who have worked within fashion brands, during the first pandemic wave, in order to analyze more in depth how the communication strategies have been developed and reorganized, and to further investigate whether some companies have purposely decided not to talk about the pandemic or to consider the first pandemic wave only at the end of it.

Other more in-depth researches could also be performed within the context of exogenous crisis communication within the fashion domain, also considering the audience reactions to each social media strategy adopted by the fashion brands.

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13. Intercultural Crisis Communication on Social Media: A Case from Fashion⁵⁸

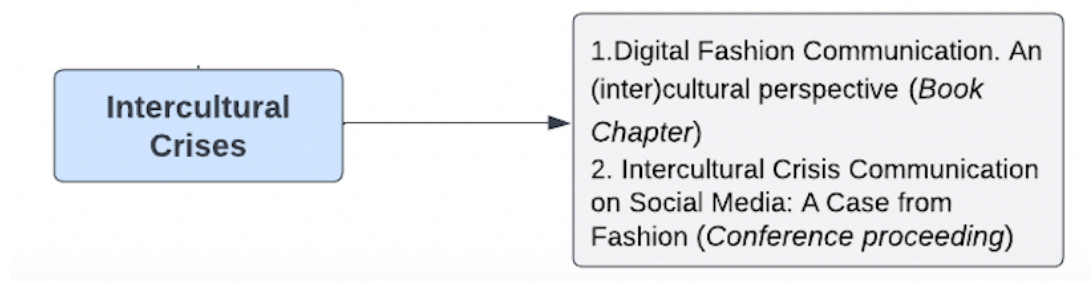


Fig. 14: PhD Thesis Design - Intercultural Crisis Communication on Social Media: A Case from Fashion

Alice Noris and Lorenzo Cantoni

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

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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 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).



Fig. 1 Two image 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>).

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 her position.



Fig. 2 Donata Meirelles' apologies (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Btq5iMBh9Xb>)

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/BtwzL97lSE6>)

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 above mentioned 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 around it; the second one includes all those posts in which users expressed their opinion on what could have caused the communication crisis.

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. Cause 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

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 “vendas” 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 Bahaian 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 mains 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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14. Intercultural Communication and Crises⁵⁹

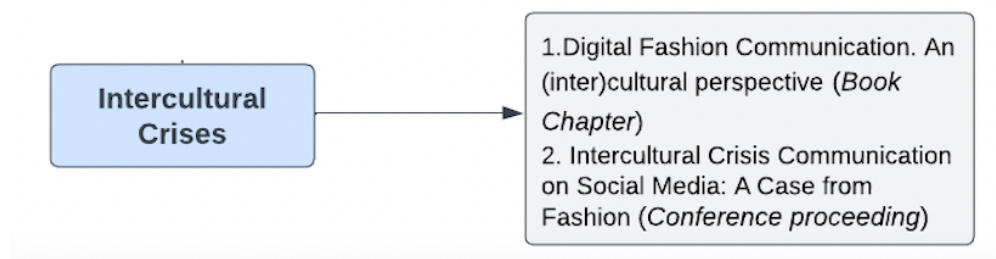


Fig. 16: PhD Thesis Design – Intercultural Communication and Crises

⁵⁹ This chapter is taken from the book *Digital Fashion Communication. An (Inter)cultural Perspective* published by Brill Research Perspectives in Popular Culture, Series: Brill Research Perspectives in Humanities and Social Sciences, a peer-reviewed series. The book was submitted on 29 August 2021, double-blind reviewed and accepted on 28 February 2022, and published on 01 September 2022

Noris, A., Cantoni, L. (2022a). Digital Fashion Communication. An (inter)cultural perspective. In M. Danesi (ed.), *Research Perspectives in Popular Culture*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill

According to Hall (1976), culture has three main characteristics: it is not innate but must be learned; the different nuances of a culture are interconnected, so when we touch one cultural aspect, everything else related to it will be affected; it is commonly shared, defining the boundaries between different groups.

When considering these three main characteristics, the importance of cultural understanding in our increasingly interconnected and globalized society becomes clear. By creating and sharing cultural values, individuals and organizations create communication practices. These communication practices can cause cultural crises, the resolution of which depends on the ability of human beings to transcend the limits of individual cultures. To do so, it is necessary to first recognize and agree to address the many hidden dimensions of cultures (Hall, 1976).

Researches on intercultural and cross-cultural communication, which took off in the 1970s, go precisely in this direction: intercultural communication refers to the study of all aspects of communication and culture, including cross-cultural communication, a branch of intercultural communication, which involves comparisons of communication across cultures (Gudykunst, 2003).

Almost concurrently with the emergence of intercultural communication studies, since the 1980s, crisis management and crisis communication studies have also been institutionalized as a legitimate organizational practice in private and public organizations in many parts of the world. This development has not taken place at the same time or in the same way in all countries and in all types of organizations (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). As it has happened for intercultural communication, the discipline has become subjected to scholarly research, transforming itself into a new field of academic study that has proven to be very dynamic in recent years (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010).

Dubrovski (2004) defines crises as temporary, unintentional and unforeseen, negative and critical circumstances that can endanger the existence and development of organizations.

They can depend on both exogenous and endogenous situations. Exogenous are all those crises not directly generated by companies' choices but caused by external factors/events that impact their business. An example would be the Covid19 pandemic (Noris & Cantoni, 2021a). Endogenous crises are all those generated by the company's own choices. Examples in the field of fashion are the Rana Plaza tragedy and the Bravo Tekstil factory crisis (Sádaba et al., 2019), as well as the cases of Donata Meirelles, former editor of Vogue Brasil, Dolce & Gabbana's Chopsticks and Pradamalia retros, Gucci's Sikh turbans, H&M's "coolest monkey" sweater, and so on (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b).

In such a digitally interconnected environment and where technological advances have shortened distances allowing different cultures to meet more and more often, the importance of knowing how to communicate at an organizational level has become evident. In fact, whether they are exogenous or endogenous crises, if not adequately managed from the point of view of communication, they can become global and deeply challenge companies, their image, reputation and business (Noris & Cantoni, 2021a; 2021b). Social media in particular, if on the one hand have brought very different communities to be much closer and interconnected, on the other hand, they have created the conditions for more intercultural misunderstandings, hence the great importance of preventing (or managing) intercultural crises. In fact, these platforms can act as a sounding board for communication crises generated on- or offline, due to cultural misunderstandings caused by the different cultural backgrounds and sensitivities of different audiences (Noris & Cantoni 2021b).

Three different areas of research on new media and its impact on society can be identified here: (i) the analysis of the impact of national/ethnic culture on the progress and development of new media; (ii) the study of the impact of new media on cultural identity; and (iii) the investigation of the effect of new media (especially social media) on aspects of cross-cultural communication, such as cross-cultural adaptation, clash, crisis, and relationship (Guo-Ming, 2012).

While it is worth considering how the latter field of research highlights the mediatizing role of new media and their convergence with popular culture, it is also worth noting that, according to cultural psychology studies, culture also has a constant impact on the surrounding environment, shaping human beings' existence, individual behaviors, motivations and needs, as well as people's reactions and interests towards social media itself (Alsaleh et al., 2019; Hjarvard, 2009; Hjarvard, 2013; Kristensen & Christensen, 2017; Rocamora, 2017; Sheldon et al., 2017).

Given the value of the topic and the scarcity of studies that combine intercultural communication and crisis communication in the fashion field, in the next pages some intercultural communication crises occurred in this domain and emphasized by the digital environment will be presented, involving the following companies: Carolina Herrera, D&G, Gucci, H&M, Prada, Uniqlo, *Teen Vogue* and *Vogue Brasil*. All such cases demonstrate the need for fashion stakeholders to have a thorough understanding of cultural aspects in order to avoid crises or, in case they occur, to promptly deal with them. Well-thought digital communication strategies, which pay due attention to intercultural communication issues, are needed in order to reach such goals.

2.5.1 Carolina Herrera

The first case of intercultural crisis analyzed here took place in June 2019, when the brand Carolina Herrera and its creative director Wes Gordon were accused of cultural appropriation by the Mexican government, while presenting their 2020 collection.

In 2018, after having spent 37 years in the fashion world and 72 runway shows, the Venezuelan designer Carolina Herrera left the helm of the brand she created in 1981 to Wes Gordon. In 2019, he was in charge of creating the Resort 2020 collection, which was presented on the company website through the following statements: “takes on the playful and colorful mood of a Latin holiday from a sunrise in Tulum, the waves in José Ignacio and dancing in Buenos Aires to the colors of Cartagena,” and is about “visceral reactions

of delight-eclectic patterns, unexpected silhouettes, pulsating energy” (EFE, 2019; Jones, 2019).

What might have seemed a tribute to some Latin American countries or cultures, led instead to an unexpected reaction from the Mexican government, which through Alejandra Frausto, its Culture Secretary, accused the brand and its creative director of having used designs “whose origins are well documented” (Jones, 2019).

In a letter dated June 10, sent to Herrera and the company’s creative director, seen by the Spanish Newspaper *El País*, Frausto claimed that the issue has to do with an ethical matter, which obliges the Mexican government to speak out and to bring such an urgent issue to the UN’s sustainable development agenda, in order to promote inclusion and to make those who are invisible visible. Moreover, she requested the company to justify the use of “cultural elements whose origins are fully documented” (Friedman, 2019b; Secretaría de Cultura, 2019).

Among the designs involved in the dispute there is a white dress with animal and floral embroidery, which, as the Secretary explained, comes from the community of Tenango de Doria in Hidalgo (EFE, 2019; Secretaría de Cultura, 2019). Furthermore, according to the same letter, there were also short dresses with colorful floral embroideries like those made in the area of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca and a dress, which is based on a typical sarape from Saltillo, Coahuila, which are used by indigenous people to make outerwear such as ‘ponchos’, ‘jorongos’, ‘gabanes’ and other blanket-like shawls (EFE, 2019; Secretaría de Cultura, 2019). The creative director of Carolina Herrera insisted that in the Resort 2020 collection there was no cultural appropriation intention, on the contrary: the brand through the collection wanted to pay an homage to the “cultural wealth” of Mexico (EFE, 2019; Friedman, 2019b). In his statement, Gordon declared that the collection “pays tribute to the richness of Mexican culture” and it aims to celebrate “the wonderful and diverse craft and textile work of Mexican artisans”. Moreover, he added that the collection had also been inspired by the country’s colors and artisanal techniques and that the pieces have “an undeniable Mexican presence” (EFE, 2019).

Wes Gordon claimed that his admiration for the Mexican artisanal work has grown over the years during his travels to Mexico: with the Resort collection he wanted to focus the attention in the different techniques and traditional aspects of Mexican heritage and to celebrate and highlight the value of the Mexican cultural heritage (EFE, 2019; Jones, 2019).

Due to Latin American Carolina Herrera's origins, the brand with the Resort collection sought to celebrate its roots and to be considered as one of the main ambassadors of the Latin American spirit across the whole world. Gordon, in conclusion, stated that one of the reasons why he accepted to work for Herrera was its respect for artisan techniques, that led the company to have an artisan workshop in the middle of Manhattan; since he landed in the company, he felt the need to honor such different artisanal techniques that still exist and are utilized across the world (EFE, 2019).

The Mexican government, which is among the first governmental institutions to raise publicly the issue of cultural appropriation in fashion, considered – on the contrary – the collection more a misappropriation of the cultural heritage of Mexico and its indigenous peoples than an inspiration; this is why it is working on a legislation to protect their art and creativity in order to prevent such cases. Carolina Herrera has not been the first brand to be accused of cultural appropriation by the Mexican government: Zara, Mango, Isabel Marant, Louis Vuitton, Michael Kors, Santa Marguerite and Etoile have all been warned by Mexico in the past (EFE, 2019).

Despite the fact that taking inspiration from different cultures has always been part of fashion design practices, the importance of recognizing and crediting the source of inspiration has been more and more stressed in recent years. The advent of the internet and of social media has amplified a brands' reach, underlining the importance of giving credit to communities' textile heritage not only from a monetary perspective but also from a communicative one, hence avoiding intercultural crises generated by the fact that what designers call inspiration can be perceived as a matter of cultural appropriation by the involved communities, which do not feel as duly recognized.

2.5.2 D&G

The Italian brand in November 2018 has been accused of racism by Chinese social media users after having released three videos online titled “Eating with Chopsticks” featuring the Asian model Zuo Ye. They appeared to be as video tutorials aimed at “teaching” how to eat three typical Italian dishes – pizza, spaghetti and a Sicilian “cannolo” – with traditional Chinese chopsticks (Fig. 7) (*Dolce & Gabbana in Cina*, 2018; Li, 2018).

The videos, which were meant to promote “The Great Event”, a Shanghai fashion show dedicated to D&G and accompanied by the hashtag #DGLovesChina and #DGTheGreatShow, provoked some positive or hilarious reactions but also huge criticisms, due to the fact that many internet users perceived them as stereotyping China (through an extensive use of lanterns, music and red colors) and offending Chinese people. The video featuring the Sicilian cannolo was also accused of being sexist: a male voiceover asked the model “is it too big for you?” (*La causa di Dolce & Gabbana contro Diet Prada*, 2021).

The controversy spread fast on Chinese social media: the three videos were removed from Weibo – one of China’s widely used social media – within 24 hours; on Instagram, however, they remained visible for longer. The discontent regarding the campaign continued and the hashtag #BoycottDolce became a Weibo trend. Via their social media users from all over the world asked Dolce & Gabbana to remove the videos, which, despite being deleted from the platforms, were republished by other users such as @diet_prada (Fig. 8), a social media account that is supposed to be held by the two designers Tony Liu and Lindsey Schuyler and whose main aim is to report copies and plagiarism of fashion designers from all over the world (Diet Prada, 2018a; Hall & Suen, 2018; Pratten & Ap, 2018).



Figure 7. Dolce & Gabbana's controversial advertisement. Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzoxIb2Fa74

It was Diet Prada that, through its collaborator Michaela Tranova, posted on Instagram a screenshot reporting an exchange of private messages between Stefano Gabbana's personal account and Michaela. There, the designer insulted the Chinese community by defining it "China Ignorant Mafia Dirty Stinking" (Fig. 9) (Diet Prada, 2018c).

After these posts, the crisis became even more evident, and the fashion company declared that Gabbana's account had been hacked and that consequently the messages had not been written by the designer himself (Fig. 10) (Dolce & Gabbana, 2018a).

Despite the justification, many celebrities such as Vogue China editor Angelica Cheung, Chen Kun, Li Bingbing, Wang Xiaoming, who were supposed to join the runway, decided to boycott it, and the brand was forced to cancel the planned Shanghai event. According to Diet Prada, the Shanghai Cultural Affair Bureau was instrumental to the decision (Diet Prada, 2018b; Hall & Suen, 2018).

The actress Zhang Ziyi, for instance, announced that she would never use Dolce & Gabbana products again, while the modeling agency China Bentley announced that 24 of its models would have no longer taken part in the event (Hall & Suen, 2018; Pratten & Ap, 2018).

Also, some independent models such as Estelle Chen and Lucky Blue Smith, who collaborated or were supposed to walk the runway in Shanghai posted their criticisms on social media (Fig. 11) (Estelle, 2018).

Dolce & Gabbana released a further statement on social media, in which they explained to their audience: “Our dream was to bring to Shanghai a tribute



Figure 8 Diet Prada’s Instagram post on Dolce & Gabbana’s advertisement. Source: www.instagram.com/p/BqXYtsZl6D5/

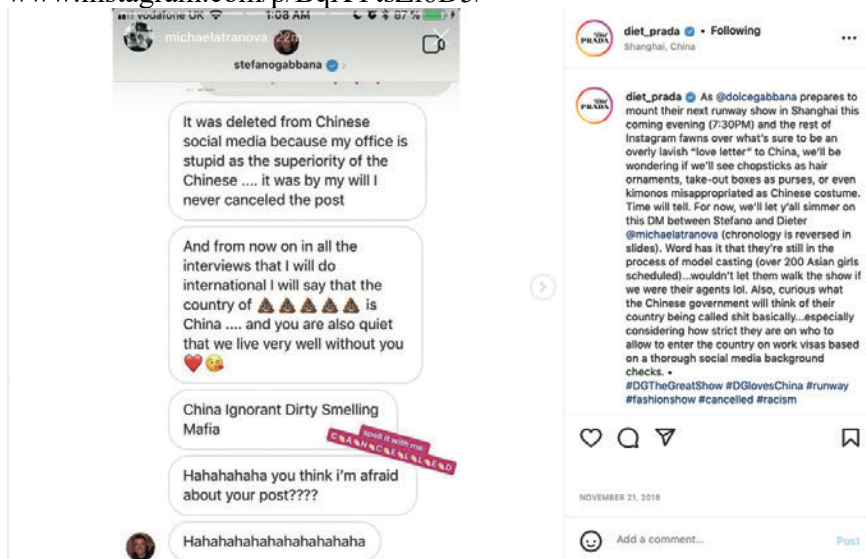


Figure 9 Diet Prada's Instagram post. Source: www.instagram.com/p/BqbTkY_FB7X/



Figure 10 Dolce & Gabbana's Instagram first apologies statement. Source: www.instagram.com/p/BqbjUT3nYa4/

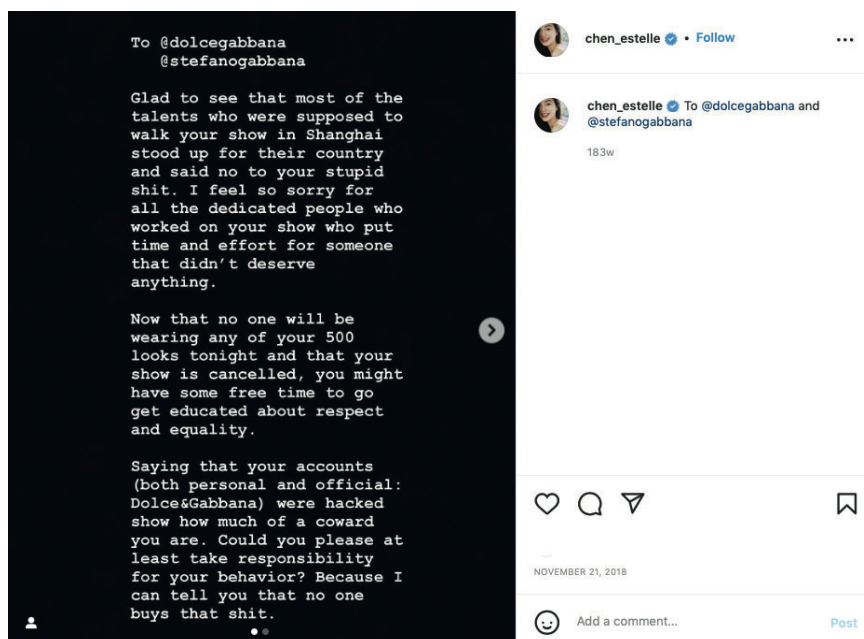


Figure 11 Estelle Chen's, French model of Chinese origins, comments on Dolce & Gabbana behavior. Source: www.instagram.com/p/Bqb3o1iH1fc/

event dedicated to China that spoke to our history and vision. It was not just a runway show, but something we created with love and passion exclusively for China and all the people around the world who love Dolce & Gabbana. What happened today was a misfortune not only for us, but also for all those who worked night and day to bring this event to life. From the bottom of our hearts, we want to express our gratitude to our friends and guests. Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana” (Dolce & Gabbana, 2018b).

On November 22nd, some retail partners in Asia responded to the controversy by discarding D&G products from their inventory. YOOX-Net-a-Porter Group, Alibaba, JD, Secoo, VIPshop, Lane Crawford and Netease announced that they would have no longer sold Dolce & Gabbana on Chinese eCommerce platforms (Ap, 2018; Steger & Lahiri, 2018).

On November 23rd, Dolce & Gabbana shared first on Weibo, then on other platforms, an official message of apologies via a video. Stefano Gabbana and Domenico Dolce asked the Chinese community for forgiveness for their behavior (Steger & Lahiri, 2018).

The video, titled *Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana apologize* (Fig. 12), has been published in Italian language and made available with Chinese and English subtitles. Domenico Dolce was the first to take the floor by saying that they have thought back so much and that they regret what happened and what they caused in China and that they apologize very much. He added that their families have always taught them to respect the various cultures around the world and that is why they want to apologize if they have made mistakes (*Dolce&Gabbana 杜嘉班纳致歉声明*, 2018).

Then, Stefano Gabbana explained that they also want to apologize to all Chinese people around the world, because there are many of them and they take this apology and this



Figure 12 Dolce & Gabbana's official statement of apologies on YouTube. Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3yJTpoOOIE

message very seriously. Back to Domenico Dolce, the man highlighted that the couple has always been very much in love with China, they have visited it and they love the culture and they still have a lot to learn so they apologize if they made mistakes in expressing themselves. Finally, Stefano Gabbana concluded saying that they will treasure this experience and surely it will never happen again, on the contrary they will try to do better, and that they will respect the Chinese culture in everything. The video ends with the two Italian designers saying “duì bu qǐ”, “we are sorry”, in Mandarin language (*Dolce&Gabbana* 杜嘉班纳致歉声明, 2018).

After some months, in January 2019, the model protagonist of the Dolce & Gabbana advertisement accused of racism and followed by the boycott of the company in China, apologized for acting in the videos, explaining that she felt really guilty and very ashamed and that her career had been almost completely ruined because of that incident (*La modella cinese del video di Dolce & Gabbana*, 2019). She explained that she would never disrespect her motherland and that she loves her country and is proud to represent China on runways. She also added that she had learned the lesson, and, in the future, she will represent Chinese people in a better light. Zuo explained that she had remained silent to avoid any further trouble and that she agreed to work for such an international brand like Dolce & Gabbana to enhance her career and that the brand presented her the campaign as a series of “funny videos” about Italian cuisine. Zuo said she often felt uncomfortable during the three-hour shooting, during which the director told her in English to show

surprise, bewilderment or appreciation concerning the food and the dishes, even though she felt out of place. She also expressed concerns about the request of using chopsticks, but she was told to follow the instructions. Zuo concluded by explaining that, as a mere model, she was not able to watch the final recording and would have never been able to have a say on that (*La modella cinese del video di Dolce & Gabbana*, 2019).

In March 2021, Diet Prada founders, Liu and Schuyler declared that they have been battling a lawsuit from the Italian brand since early 2019. In fact, following the criticisms and the suspension of “The Great Event” in Shanghai, Dolce & Gabbana filed an action against Diet Prada in civil court in Milan. They claimed defamation and asked Diet Prada for €3 million for Dolce & Gabbana and €1 million for Stefano Gabbana in damages. According to Diet Prada, the non-profit Fashion Law Institute at Fordham has decided to represent Liu and Schuyler *pro bono* in collaboration with the Italian law firm AMSL Avvocati, which is offering Diet Prada a reduced rate. Furthermore, the bloggers created a fundraising campaign on GoFundMe to cover legal expenses⁶⁰ (*La causa di Dolce & Gabbana contro Diet Prada*, 2021; Nguyen, 2021). End of July 2021, Diet Prada had collected 55,091 USD from 1.5k (mostly micro) donors.

In November 2018, the London-based Brand Finance consultancy estimated that the scandal could wipe up to 20% off Dolce & Gabbana brand’s value of USD 937 million. This loss was never officially confirmed by the fashion company (ET Online, 2018).

2.5.3 Gucci

The first case that involved Gucci happened in February 2018 and lasted more than one year. The controversy started when the company shared its new autumn–winter collection on- and offline. Many reacted with enthusiasm to the runway presentation, others, instead, had a critical reaction. Among the internet users that negatively reacted to the campaign,

⁶⁰ www.gofundme.com/f/diet-prada-legal-defense-fund.

there was the Canadian actor and dancer Avan Jogia, of Indian origins, who on February 22nd, 2018 criticized the brand for having decided to let the runway be walked by a majority of white models and for asking non-Sikh people to wear turbans (Fig. 13) (Avan Jogia, 2018).

A day later, the US Sikh Coalition made on its social media a public statement underlying the fact that Gucci culturally appropriated the Sikh turban by transforming it into a mere



Figure 13 Avan Jogia's, Canadian actor of Indian origins, Twitter comment on Gucci's choice to utilize turbans for the presentation of the autumn–winter collection 2018 Source: twitter.com/avanjogia/status/966464402047229952

fashion item, without considering its symbolic value for Sikh people and without observant Sikh models wear it (Fig. 14) (Sikh Coalition, 2018).

The initial backlash had little effect, in fact, despite the criticisms addressed to the company, Gucci in 2019 started to sell an item called “Indy Full Turban”, described as a “gorgeously crafted turban”, “ready to turn heads while keeping you in comfort as well as trademark style” on Nordstrom platform for a price of nearly \$800 (Chiu, 2019).

The placing on the market of the product caused once again a prompt reaction from the Sikh community, which through the Sikh coalition released a second post on their social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) on May 14th, 2019, underlying once again the concept of cultural appropriation (Sikh Coalition, 2019) (Fig. 15). According to Rajanpreet Kaur (2021), from the Sikh Coalition, the association perceived the choice of commercializing such a product as a trivialization of an item of faith, whose wearers often face discrimination and attacks due to their religious identity. In addition to that, according to the Sikh Coalition, both Nordstrom and Gucci when commercializing the product, made no effort to provide any kind of historical and cultural information on the turbans and on the community that has been wearing them for centuries not as an accessory but as a symbol of faith and to represent who they are.



Figure 14 Sikh Coalition's Twitter Comment on Gucci's autumn– winter collection 2018.
Source: twitter.com/sikh_coalition/status/967111961313005570

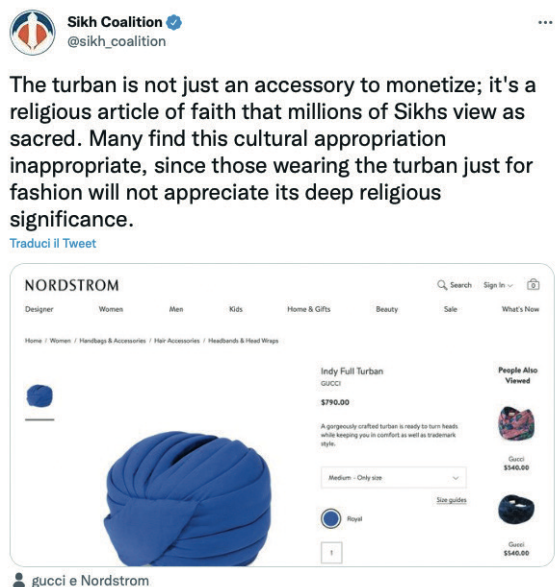


Figure 15 Nordstrom eCommerce platform selling Gucci’s turban. Source: twitter.com/sikh_coalition/status/1128377686353764353

Rajanpreet Kaur also explained that the Sikh coalition promptly tried to reach out Gucci and Nordstrom to get to know more on their position concerning the issue.

On May 15th, the turban’s listing on Nordstrom’s eCommerce was listed as sold out, its \$790 price tag was no longer visible and the company sent a letter to the Sikh Coalition apologizing for selling turbans by saying “we’ve made the decision to stop carrying the ‘Indy Full Turban’ and by asking to the Sikh Coalition their availability in becoming a resource on these types of issues in the future” (Snow, 2019). On May 16th, Nordstrom also stated on Twitter: “We have decided to stop carrying this product and have removed it from the site. It was never our intent to disrespect this religious and cultural symbol. We sincerely apologize to anyone who may have been offended by this” (Nordstrom, 2019).

Gucci has never issued an official statement of apologies, although the company in summer 2019 nominated Renee Tirado as its first diversity chief officer in order to face the accuses of having produced religiously insensitive and racially offensive designs and to carry out new projects based on diversity (Muret, 2019).

A second case that brought Gucci to the hire of a diversity chief officer happened at the beginning of 2019, when Gucci put on the market a piece of the autumn–winter 2018 collection, a \$890 “balaclava” knit, which covered the bottom half of the model face and had a cutout mouth with large red lips. Due to the fact that it was soon judged as racist by internet users, it had to be pulled from the market in a few days (Ferrier, 2019; *Gucci accusato di razzismo*, 2019).

The accusations started from the social media, where people started to tweet or repost photos of the sweater, worn by a white woman, commenting on it. Some of the users remarked and criticized the fact that the sweater was also made available to the public during the US Black History Month (Fig. 16) (Cocolo Minaj, 2019; Ferrier, 2019).

In this case, the apology from the company arrived promptly, and on February 7th, without giving time to the social accusations to spread globally, Gucci shared on its social media account a message of apologies: “Gucci deeply apologizes for the accusations made. We consider diversity a fundamental value that must be fully upheld, respected and put at the origin of every decision we make. We are fully committed to increasing diversity in our company and turning this incident into a powerful lesson for the entire Gucci team” (Fig. 17) (Gucci, 2019).



Figure 16 Twitter user’s reaction to Gucci’s sweatshirt. Source: twitter.com/i/events/1093355062875676672

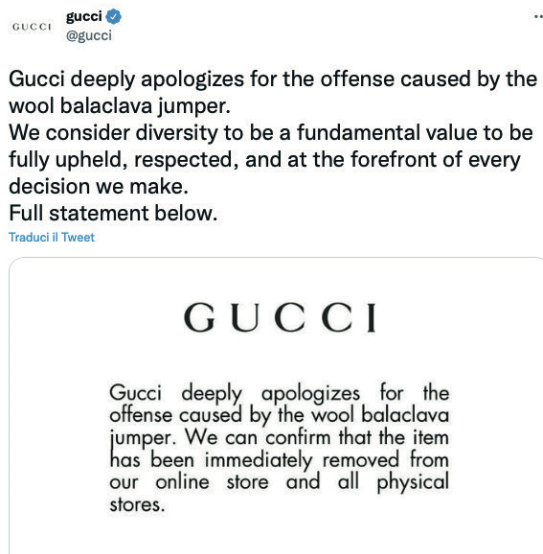


Figure 17 Gucci’s apologies on Twitter. Source: twitter.com/gucci/status/1093345744080306176

2.5.4 H&M

In January 2018, H&M launched in its online store an advertising campaign representing the image of a 5-year-old boy of color son of Kenyan immigrants, wearing a green sweatshirt showing the words “coolest monkey in the jungle” written in white capital letters, while a Caucasian child model was presenting an orange sweatshirt with the phrase “Mangrove Jungle – Official Survival Expert” (*Case Study: H&M’s Coolest Monkey in the Jungle*, n.d.).

Soon after the launch of the campaign, H&M had to face the reactions on social media from celebrities, journalists, lawyers and activists, consumers and internet users in general across the globe, who commented on the advertisement. Many of them accused the company of lack of empathy, insensitiveness and considered the advertisement as being racist, inappropriate and offensive (Fig. 18–19) (Cancel Rent & Mortgages, 2018; Selene, 2018).

Others commented on the fact that the reference to a monkey is historically perceived as inappropriate due to the fact that it features racial and ethnic decrrial. Comparing black people to a ‘monkey’ is in fact a negative stereotype of people of African origins and could imply a racist undertone while dehumanizing people of African descent (Fig. 20) (IEA, 2018).

According to Plous and Williams (1995), comparing black people to ape can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries, during the American slavery period, where many people in Europe and the U.S. considered black people as mentally inferior, physically and culturally unevolved, and apelike in their external appearance. According to Goff et al. (2008), such ideas started to attract interest when the anthropologist Franz Boas and scientist Charles Darwin hypothesized that there might be an evolutionary spectrum among primates that from one side contained apes and monkeys at the less evolved level, continuing through wild and/or deformed anthropoids, and culminating with whites at the other side. According to such theory, peoples of African descent could be placed in the classification as residing somewhere in between.

Such a “scientific” theorization laid the foundation to support the stereotypes and racism that accompanied peoples of African descent during the 19th and 20th century: they were depicted as lazy, belligerent, unintelligent, hypersexual, etc. Such representation culminated with the use of such stereotypes also within visual culture, when many US films played on this iconography. As an example, the 1933 film *King Kong*, despite being often referred in popular culture as the story of “Beauty and the Beast”, according to Goff et al. (2008) it has other allegorical elements to be mentioned: Kong is in fact associated with the use of negative caricatured Black savages on “Skull Island” and presents “Negro features”; furthermore, many film researchers claim that “King Kong” has imprinted in the American cinematography a racist tale about interracial romance in which the “Beauty” is represented as “white” and the “Beast” as “black”.

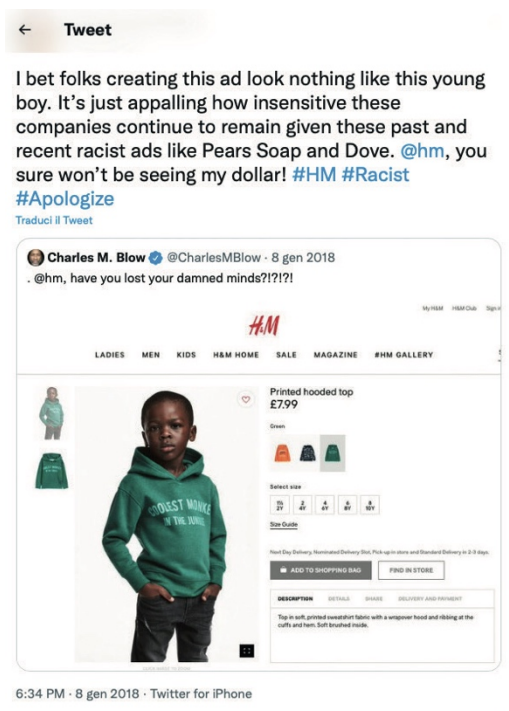


Figure 18–19 Twitter users' reactions to the H&M kid sweater advertisement. Sources: twitter.com/realgaraad/status/950420436331978752, twitter.com/ArianelaSelene/status/950207848910290944

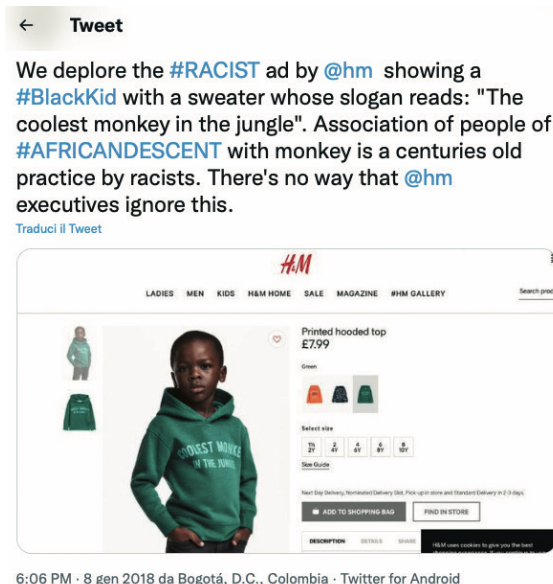


Figure 20 Another Twitter user's reaction to H&M's advertisement. Source: twitter.com/ieafro/status/950413509174624256

The H&M backlash spread globally also due to the criticisms made by well-known celebrities such as the singers Diddy (Sean Combs) and The Weeknd, a Canadian artist of Ethiopian descent, who publicly condemned H&M's choices (Fig. 21–22) (LOVE, 2018; The Weeknd, 2018).

Drawing their attention to Terry Mango, the child's mother, who had to face a backlash for defending H&M and the ad, some internet users explained their concerns on the criticisms made to H&M (*Case Study: H&M's Coolest Monkey in the Jungle*, n.d.). They claimed that the only negative aspect of the campaign was mainly due to the negative attitude of internet users who saw racism in the image (Fig. 23–24), (Evan, 2018; Shannon Bell, 2018).

H&M first replied to the accuses on Twitter on January 8th. The customer service apologized to users for having offended some, but not for posting the ad, and it clarified the company had removed the image from its online stores (Fig. 25–26) (H&M Customer Service, 2018a; H&M Customer Service, 2018b).

However, such apologies were not considered enough by many internet users, since the sweatshirts were still available on the European eCommerce, while the only thing which had been removed was the picture of the model.

The following day, January 9th, H&M issued another statement. The brand stated that it stopped selling the sweatshirt and recycled it. The apologies were released both on H&M website and on social media. Part of the updated apology, still posted on H&M China website reads: "We agree with all the criticism



Figure 21 Diddy's reaction on Twitter on H&M sweater. Source: twitter.com/Diddy/status/950474809653301258

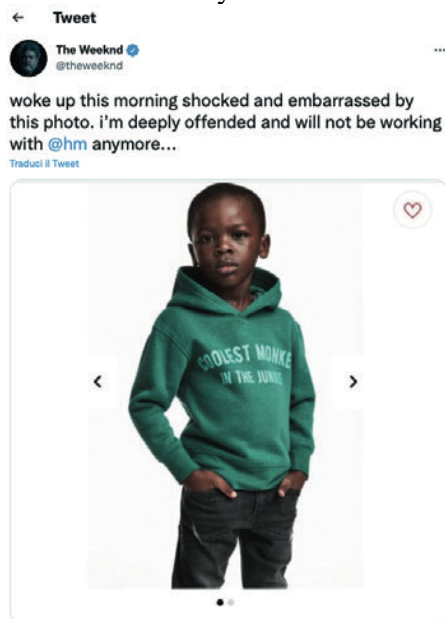


Figure 22 The Weeknd's reaction on Twitter on H&M sweater. Source: twitter.com/theweeknd/status/950447182829699072



Figure 23–24 Twitter users’ reactions in defense of H&M. Sources: twitter.com/xshannonlb/status/950837149183692801, twitter.com/EvyKing_/status/990619939651407874



Figure 25–26 H&M first apologies published on Twitter provided by the Customer Service. Sources: twitter.com/hm_custserv/status/950333228786823168, twitter.com/hm_custserv/status/950346140129644544

that this has generated – we have got this wrong and we agree that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it exists. We appreciate the support of those who have seen that our product and promotion were not intended to cause

offence but, as a global brand, we have a responsibility to be aware of and attuned to all racial and cultural sensitivities – and we have not lived up to this responsibility this time” (*H&M Issues Unequivocal Apology For Poorly Judged Product And image*, 2018). The official statement was accompanied on H&M social media by three apology messages respectively on January 9th, 13th and 16th (Fig. 27–29) (H&M, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c).

Despite the apologies, the company had to face boycotts and protests, in particular in South African cities such as Cape Town, Pretoria, and Johannesburg, in which the company has been forced to temporarily close some stores. Among the protesters, there were also the South African Economic Freedom Fighters, which marched through shops, and destroyed some H&M stores (*Case Study: H&M’s Coolest Monkey in the Jungle*, n.d.).

Nearly two weeks after the backlash, H&M nominated Annie Wu, a Taiwanese immigrant raised in New York, as global leader for diversity and inclusiveness. According to the Walter Page Center/Public Relations Ethics (*Case Study: H&M’s Coolest Monkey in the Jungle*, n.d.), H&M after the hire of Wu took some actions to fight racism and to recover from such intercultural crisis: (i) the company hired a Nigerian-American as North America head of inclusion and diversity; (ii) developed a seven-step system for all new clothing before they are sold; (iii) developed a 12 people system in order to have a minimum number of people, who observe a photo after it is uploaded; (iv) proposed a new system to flag clothing at every stage and to make notes about possible sensitivities; (v) augmented the number of employees doing final-round quality checks; (vi) affirmed that by 2025, 100% of H&M employees would feel they have the same opportunity within the company (*Case Study: H&M’s Coolest Monkey in the Jungle*, n.d.).

In addition to that, in June 2020, H&M donated \$500,000 to the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Color of Change, and the American Civil Liberties Union, soon after the death of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020, in Minnesota and the subsequent protests against police (*Case Study: H&M’s Coolest Monkey in the Jungle*, n.d.).

2.5.5 Prada

In November 2018, the company debuted with the Pradamalia line of products, a series of branded keychain, cell phone cases, clothing, jewelry, and various

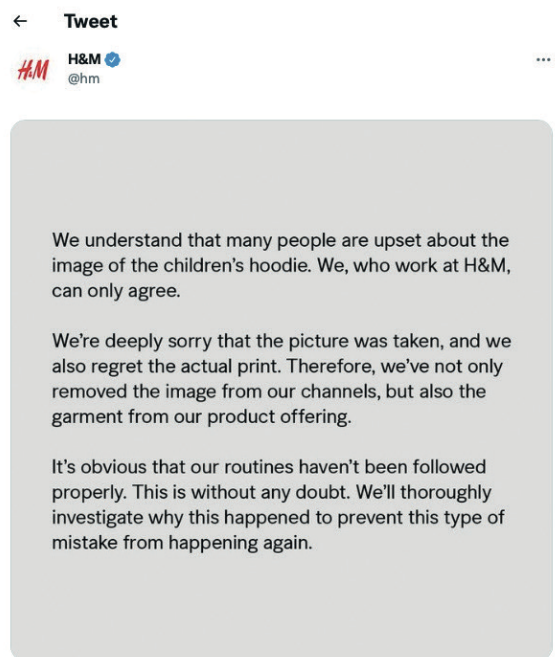


Figure 27 H&M further statement of apologies released on Twitter on January 9th, 2018.
Source: [twitter.com/hm/status/ 950680302715899904](https://twitter.com/hm/status/950680302715899904)

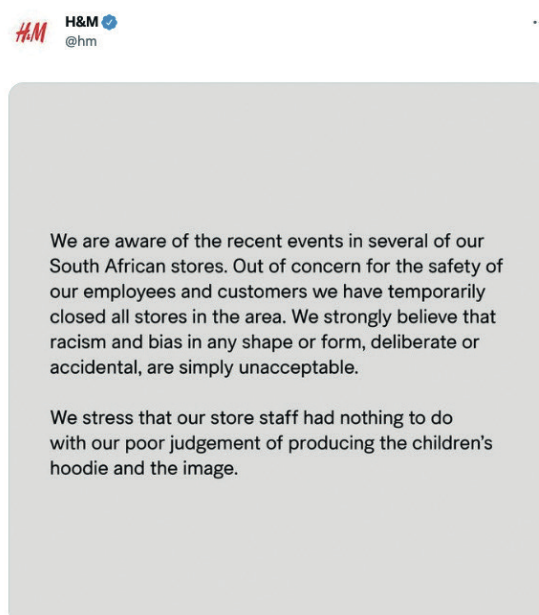


Figure 28 H&M further statement of apologies released on Twitter on January 13th, 2018. Source: [twitter.com/hm/status/ 952267740143906816](https://twitter.com/hm/status/952267740143906816)

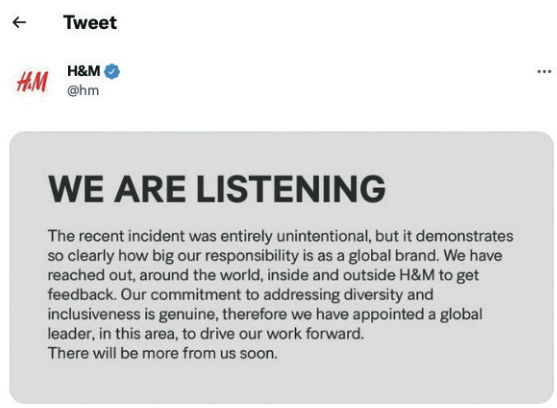


Figure 29 H&M further statement of apologies released on Twitter on January 16th, 2018. Source: [twitter.com/hm/status/ 953345162415149057](https://twitter.com/hm/status/953345162415149057)

leather goods ranging in price from \$260 to \$860 and described on its website as “a new family of mysterious tiny creatures that are one part biological, one part technological, all parts Prada” (*Prada Blackface Scandal Results in Major Settlement*, 2020; Williams et al., 2018).

Soon after their put on the market, the seven fashion characters designed by the fashion brand became the subject of a debate that spread and went viral on social media. Prada had in fact to retire its products after the monkey named Otto displayed in New York City’s SoHo neighborhood in Manhattan store was perceived by some customers as racist, since it appeared to represent blackface imagery (*Prada Blackface Scandal Results in Major Settlement*, 2020).

The issue raised due to the fact that some of the items of the collection, in particular the monkeys Toto and Otto, have been compared by New York-based civil rights attorney Chinyere Ezie to Little Black Sambo, a character from an 1899 children’s book written by Helen Bannerman. Despite the intention of the writer at the time was to portray people of color under a positive light, in contrast with the stereotypes that portrayed black people as uneducated and uncivilized, over the time that character became subject of discussion and controversy, especially during the 20th century (Chinyere Ezie, 2018). According to Robin

Bernstein (2011), the character was represented following the so-called “pickaninny style”, an American word that suggests that racist caricatures follow three criteria: the figure is colored, youthful, and resistant/immune to ache.

The lawyer noticed the products at the Prada store in Manhattan’s Soho shopping district by happenstance, after returning from a conference in Washington. She wrote on Facebook that she was struck by how the items looked similar to images she saw in an exhibit on blackface at the museum the same day and that seeing the products left her “shaking with anger” and she also criticized the company on her Facebook account (Fig. 30) (Chinyere Ezie, 2018).

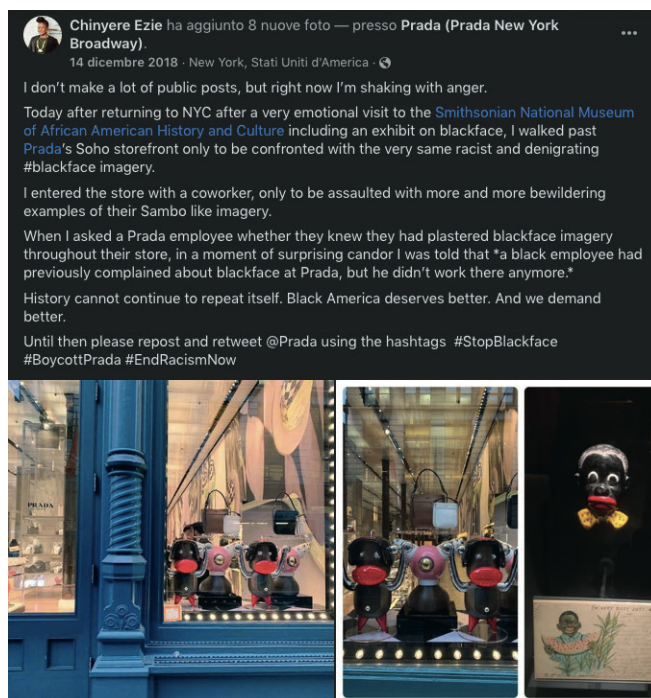


Figure 30 Chinyere Ezie’s reaction to Pradamalia gadgets. Source: www.facebook.com/300322/posts/10102198924210054/

Ezie’s Facebook post had been shared more than 11,000 times and commented more than 5,000 times (Chinyere Ezie, 2018).

Prada released on December 14th a statement in which it declared that the Pradamalia products depict “imaginary creatures not intended to have any reference to the real world

and certainly not blackface” and that Prada Group never had the intention of offending anyone; they also added that they abhor all forms of racism and racist imagery, therefore claimed that would have withdrawn the characters in question from the market (Fig. 31–32) (PRADA, 2018a; 2018b).

On December 16th, Prada released an official statement in which they further highlighted that all products had been removed from the Pradamalia collection and that the company would learn from its mistakes (Fig. 33) (PRADA, 2018c).

The lawyer who started the controversy criticized Prada’s excuses explaining to the CNN that the same kind of excuses from Prada have been heard throughout history about racist imagery and that a multinational company could have done its research about what these painful images mean for people of color. She also added that there was no mistaking it and not ambiguity (Williams et al., 2018).



Figure 31–32 Prada’s statements of apologies released on Twitter. Sources: twitter.com/Prada/status/1073614897207017481, twitter.com/Prada/status/1073615042753519617

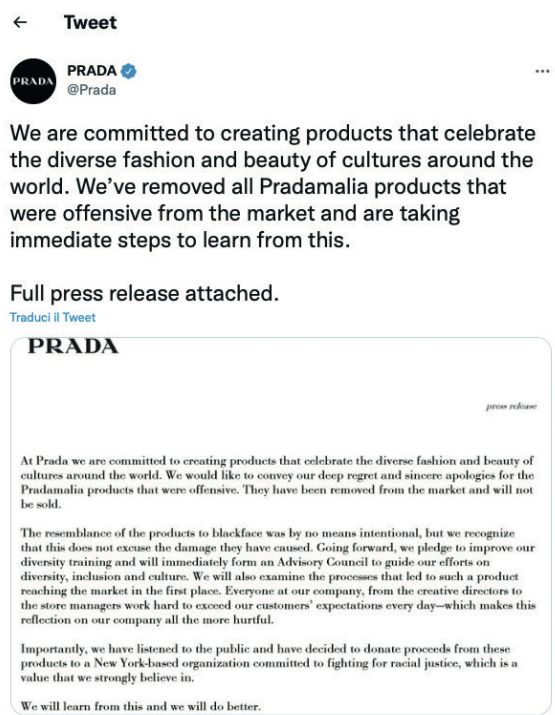


Figure 33 Prada's official press release shared on Twitter. Sources: [twitter.com/Prada/status /1074408250299375621](https://twitter.com/Prada/status/1074408250299375621)

On February 5th, 2020, more than a year later, Chinyere Ezie announced she had reached an agreement with the luxury fashion company over the brand's advertising and sale of products featuring blackface representations. The official complaint filed by Ezie to the New York City Human Rights Commission over the racist imagery, led to an agreement in which Prada has been required to: create a scholarship and a paid internship program at Prada for racial minorities and other under-represented groups; develop a racial equity training program and a series of trainings on equal employment opportunity laws for Prada employees, including the executives in New York and Milan on a reoccurring basis for six years; be fully committed in the recruitment and retainment of underrepresented employees, including racial minorities; have a permanent diversity officer, who among her/his aims has to strengthen Prada's policies on discrimination, retaliation, and racial equity, and to ensure Prada's business activities and hiring are conducted in a racially equitable manner; enforce and report to the NYC Human Rights Commission for a period of two years (*Prada Blackface Scandal Results in Major Settlement*, 2020).

Finally, Prada, after its blackface scandal, has also decided to launch a Diversity Council, pursuant to settlement terms, that works to create new relations and partnerships between Prada and different social justice organizations for a period of six years (*Prada Blackface Scandal Results in Major Settlement*, 2020).



Figure 34 Teen Vogue staff's Twitter statement on the accuses toward Alexi McCammond. Source: twitter.com/allegrakirkland/status/1369071340544753665

2.5.6 Teen Vogue

This crisis took place in 2021, it involved *Teen Vogue* and Alexi McCammond, who was supposed to become editor-in-chief of the magazine by March 2021. McCammond has resigned from *Teen Vogue* after being accused of racism and homophobia for a series of tweets she published on her account a decade earlier, in 2011 (Robertson, 2021).

The woman started her career as a political reporter, she was also involved in the President Biden's campaign for Axios and contributed to MSNBC and NBC. In 2019, the National Association of Black Journalists gave her the title of emerging journalist of the year and

according to the *New York Times* she would have been the third Black woman to become *Teen Vogue*'s top editor, after Lindsay Peoples Wagner and Elaine Welteroth (Robertson, 2021).

However, due to the fact that some of McCammond's tweets from 2011 that were considered offensive towards the Asian community had resurfaced, more than 20 *Teen Vogue* staff members pointed it out and complained through an internal letter and a shared statement on social media, distancing themselves from McCammond's past behaviour (Fig. 34) (Allegra Kirkland, 2021; Peiser, 2021).

McCammond posts included comments on Asian people physical and appearance features, as in the following images (Fig. 35–36), (Jamal, 2021).

Despite the fact that McCammond, in 2019, after having apologized for the tweets, removed them from her account, screenshots started to recirculate in March 2021 after the news of her hiring at *Teen Vogue*. The woman apologized for her actions again both in front of her followers/audience and in front of Condé Nast staff by clarifying that there's no excuse for perpetuating those awful stereotypes and that she felt sorry for having utilized such a hurtful and inexcusable language against Asian communities (Fig. 37) (Alexi McCammond, 2021a).

After the criticisms that raised on social media and the debate that spread across the world, Condé Nast, *Teen Vogue*'s publisher, in agreement with McCammond announced her resignation as reported by *The New York Times*, Stan Duncan, the chief people officer at Condé Nast, released the following statement: "After speaking with Alexi this morning, we agreed that it was best to part ways, so as to not overshadow the important work happening at *Teen Vogue*" (Robertson, 2021).

Alexi McCammond claimed on Twitter that: "past tweets have overshadowed the work I've done to highlight the people and issues that I care about" (Fig. 38), (Alexi McCammond, 2021b).



Figure 35–36 Screenshots of Alexi McCammond’s posts released on Twitter in 2011 (later deleted). Source: [www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/fashion/post-alexi-mccammond-s-racist-tweet-outcry-ultra-beauty-pau ses-teen-vogue-ads-101615532021519.html](http://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/fashion/post-alexi-mccammond-s-racist-tweet-outcry-ultra-beauty-pau-ses-teen-vogue-ads-101615532021519.html)

Stakeholders pressuring Condé Nast, in addition to the staff itself, readers, and social media, include at least two advertisers: Ulta Beauty and Burt’s Bees, major advertisers for *Teen Vogue*, which had suspended their campaigns with the magazine. Moreover, according to *The New York Times*, Alexi McCammond’s application had been directly reviewed by executives such as Roger Lynch and Anna Wintour before she was hired by Condé Nast to work at *Teen Vogue* (Robertson, 2021).



Figure 37 Alexi McCammond's official releases on Twitter after the accuses of racism. Source: twitter.com/alexi/status/1369835727094157318

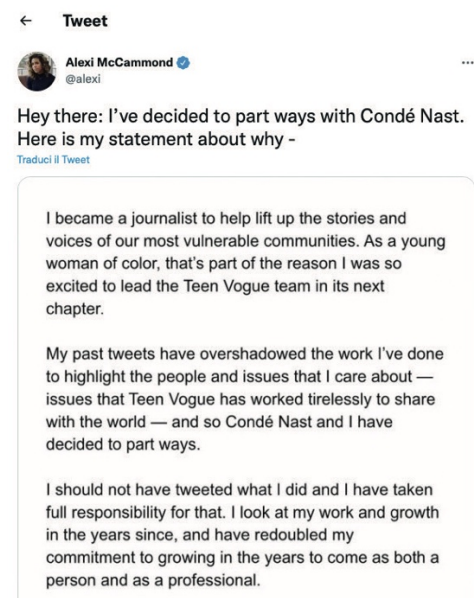


Figure 38 Alexi McCammond's resignation from Condé Nast after the accuses released on Twitter. Source: twitter.com/alexi/status/1372603793825751040

Vogue's chief content officer and global editorial director were aware of the woman's past racist tweets, and McCammond herself mentioned them during the interview process. According to a corporate executive who spoke with the newspaper, but asked to remain anonymous, Ms. Wintour discussed the tweets firsthand with leaders of color at Condé Nast before the job was offered to McCammond. The candidate in addition to impressing Condé Nast's leadership with her career path, had also demonstrated with the 2019 apology that she had learned from her mistakes (Robertson, 2021). However, the interviewee declared that the editorial group although it was aware of the racist tweets, was not aware of some homophobic tweets and a photo, also from 2011, but recently published by a right-wing website, showing the woman in a Native American costume at a Halloween party. The vetting process had not revealed the additional material since it was deleted (Robertson, 2021). According to *The New York Times*' sources, Anna Wintour at an early stage tried to offer her support to McCammond by having her attend meetings with staff members and other groups to allow her to further apologize and listen to their concerns. In addition, Condé Nast's human resources department also met with *Teen Vogue* staff and reminded employees of the importance of checking with the communications team before making public statements, and staff members were also reminded of the importance of keeping criticism "in the family" (Peiser, 2019; Robertson, 2021).

2.5.7 Uniqlo

In October 2019, a dispute between South Korean internet users and the Japanese clothing brand Uniqlo raised after a new advertisement campaign launched by the company was criticized as mocking Korean victims of wartime forced labor and brothel workers (Cha, 2019; *Uniqlo ad withdrawn in Korea after being accused of condoning wartime atrocities*, 2019).

In the commercial, the 99-year-old American entrepreneur and interior designer Iris Apfel, who has more than 1.6 million followers on Instagram (Iris Apfel, 2021), was having a conversation with the teenage fashion designer Kheris Rogers. The girl asked the lady how

she used to dress when she was a teenager and Apfel replied: “I can’t remember that far back!” (Cha, 2019).

In the South Korean version of the advertisement, the company instead of making a literal translation of that phrase had subtitles saying: “Gosh! How can I remember something that goes back 80 years?” (Cha, 2019). The reference to 80 years triggered a reaction from some South Koreans, since 1939 is considered the year in which Japan’s campaign of forced labour camps and sexual slavery started to take place in the country (Min, 2003), therefore the mention of that specific period within the translation has been perceived as being deliberately offensive.

The Japanese colonization of Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945, apart from forced labour, included also the use of “comfort women”, a cruel euphemism to address girls and women, most of them Korean, obliged to work in wartime brothels (Cha, 2019).

Criticisms of the Uniqlo campaign went viral, the spread of the protests across the whole South Korea both online and offline forced the company to remove the video from the web. The backlash happened after South Korea’s Supreme Court in 2018 stated that Japan’s Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries had to compensate South Korean victims of forced labor. Moreover, in July 2019, Japanese authorities strengthened controls on the export of some chipmaking materials to South Korea, causing on the other side a boycott of Japanese products, going from beer to pens and clothing (Cha, 2019). Furthermore, soon after the beginning of the protests, a 19-second parody YouTube video became viral, receiving more than 101,000 views in two days (Fig. 39) (Cha, 2019).

In the video, the South Korean history major college student Yoon Dong-hyun acted with Yang Geum-deok, a nearly 90-year-old woman, who was a forced laborer for Japan’s Mitsubishi during World War II. The student asked the woman how hard it was for her when she was young, and she replied: “It is impossible to ever forget that awfully painful memory”. Yoon posted the video with subtitles in English and Japanese (Minji, 2019).

According to a Reuters' internal anonymous source from Uniqlo "There was no intention to touch on the issue of comfort women or South Korea-Japan dispute". The Uniqlo official also added that the translation, which was done in South Korea, was meant to help convey the message of the original commercial. She furthermore refused to name who had done the translation (Cha, 2019).



Figure 39 Yoon Dong-hyun and Yang Geum-deok's reply to Uniqlo's advertisement.
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4df1cC11RQ&t=4s>

The fact happened after Uniqlo suffered a first backlash on July 11th, 2019, when the Uniqlo's CFO Takeshi Okazaki during the earnings press conference explained that he "thought" that the impact of a boycott of Japanese goods from Korea, due to the above mentioned political and economic tensions among the two countries, wouldn't have last long (Hyun-woo, 2019).

On July 4th, 2019, Japan had in fact started to apply export curbs on South Korea for three fundamental materials for the development of semiconductors and displays, in response to Seoul's handling of a wartime forced labor issue. The boycott was joined as a form of protest by many South Koreans (Lee, 2019).

After those affirmations, FRL Korea, the operator of Uniqlo in Korea, sent a first message of apology to reporters and journalists, who asked for a brand statement over the CFO's phrases, but it decided not to post the apology on its official website or on its social media accounts, causing a further reaction by some Korean consumers who felt under considered

by the company (Hyun-woo, 2019). On July 11th, 2019, Japan's Fast Retailing Co. finally released an official statement of apologies on its Korean and Japanese websites claiming that the CFO had "hoped" not "thought" the impact would not have lasted long (*Apology Posted on the UNIQLO South Korea Website*, 2019; Hyun-woo, 2019).

2.5.8 Vogue Brasil

This case (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b) involved Donata Meirelles, former *Vogue Brasil* director, who resigned from her position after receiving accuses by social media users of having organized a "slavery party".

The event took place from February 8th until February 10th, 2019, in Salvador de Bahia. To celebrate her 50th birthday, the woman invited guests from all over the world. Moreover, in order to further promote the event on social media, Donata also launched an *ad-hoc* hashtag "#doshow50", to be utilized by guests on their personal profiles, in particular on Instagram, to share contents related to the party (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b).

Among the pictures shared on Instagram during the party through the #doshow50 hashtag, some of them showed the woman and her guests sitting on an ornate chair and accompanied by standing Afro-Brazilian workers dressed in white typical Bahian clothes (Fig. 40–41) (Aldersley, 2019; Maria Lucia Hohan, 2019; Paulo Germano, 2019).

Such pictures did not go unnoticed by social media users, who reacted in different ways to the images and started to post their comments and opinions about the party through the hashtag #doshow50. Some Internet users found the party a celebration of the Afro-Brazilian culture and of its black community (Fig. 42) (Ella Show, 2019),



Figure 40–41 Two images from the party. Donata Meirelles (Post Deleted); Maria Lucia Hohan, Donata Meirelles' Guest. Sources: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6708147/Vogue-Brazil-style-director-resigns-invoking-slavery-birthday-photo.html>, www.instagram.com/p/Btq3Gi6I9Y9

others instead accused her of having chosen a racist theme party, whose many symbols were disrespectful for the Candomblé folk religion and alluded to the colonialist period

when Brasil heavily relied on slave labor. The debate led to an unexpected crisis (Fig. 43) (Áurea Carolina, 2019; Luciana Genro, 2019; Stephanie Ribeiro, 2019).



Figure 42 An Instagram post in favor of Donata Meirelles party. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bt6AHU4gRVn/>



Figure 43 An Instagram post against Donata Meirelles' party. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BtrYzj6hhqZ/>

Many Instagram reactions referred to the chair used to take some of the pictures, which was compared to the *cadeira de sinhá*, an ornate chair utilized during colonialism by slave

masters. Furthermore, also the Afro-Brazilian workers attire was considered as inappropriate, since, according to user opinions, the clothes that the ladies were wearing could be compared to the white uniforms worn by Brazilian house slaves (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b).

Although on February 9th, Donata Meirelles apologized on Instagram (Fig. 44), through a post in which she clarified that the chairs were an artefact chosen to celebrate Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion and that the Bahian workers' clothes were not slave uniforms, but traditional clothes (Donata Meirelles, 2019), the woman after a few days had to resign from her position at *Vogue Brasil*.

Also *Vogue Brasil* apologized on its Instagram account (Fig. 45) and clarified which would have been its next steps within the company to increase awareness on the topic, to fight racism and to increase empathy (Voguebrasil, 2019).

Beside published posts and comments, we should report that six of the ten Afro-Brazilian workers portrayed dressed in white, who had been hired to welcome the guests, and who have been referred to as the victims of the racist party, went to the police in Salvador De Bahia to fill an official complaint due to the offenses suffered on social media for having taken part to the party as workers for the ABAM Association. Moreover, the ladies complained for a drastic reduction in terms of work due to their clients' fear of racial repercussions as a consequence of the backlash they have suffered after the party (Noris & Cantoni, 2021b).



Figure 44 Donata Meirelles's apologies. Source: www.instagram.com/p/Btq5iMBh9Xb

Nota de esclarecimento

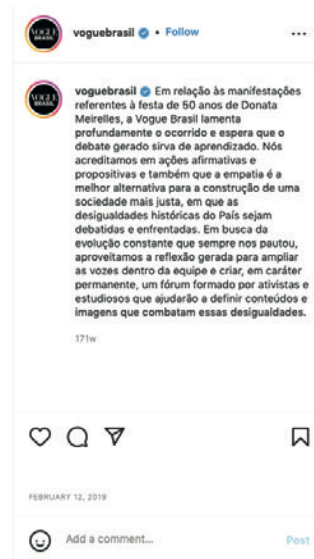


Figure 45 *Vogue Brasil* 's apologies. Source: www.instagram.com/p/BtwzL97lSE6

Noris & Cantoni (2021b), who reached ABAM, the Association from which the workers were hired, reported a statement released by the Association, who explained 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....

Noris & Cantoni (2021b), through Donata Meirelles' case, present the limits and the challenges that social media users still need to consider when it comes to intercultural communication aspects. Not all the people on social media have perceived Donata Meirelles and her guests' message in the same way, and this might be due not only to the fact that social media mediate messages and act as communication filters, but can also depend on people's different cultural and societal backgrounds, on their past and present experiences, ideas, thoughts and (pre-)judices. Moreover, even if ABAM ladies were supposed to be the victims of racism by many social media users, their voices and perspectives had not been considered as relevant by the majority of commentators.

2.6 Understanding and Mapping Crises

After having presented some recent cases (many others might have been added), it is now time to reflect on some lessons learned, outlining the most frequent issues, which dimensions of digital media make them possible, and how to avoid them (if possible).

2.6.1 A Three Layers Map

First of all, let us consider the main issues at stake – the reasons presented by critics to explain why they are against a message or campaign.

If we go back to the three layers of “colo” – agriculture, culture and cult – as presented in the previous Part (*Fashion, a fascinating history*), most of the crises refer to the second and the third ones. However, in a recent case in which Versace has been accused of suggesting that Macau and Hong Kong are independent states because of their names

being listed on a T-shirt (Fig. 46), leading to an official statement by the company apologizing with China (Fig. 47), also the first layer might have a role (Chen, 2019; Donatella Versace, 2019; Glenday, 2019; Versace, 2019; *Versace ha fatto un pasticcio con la Cina*, 2019).

The second layer is where most crises happen, as it has been documented through the above presented cases. Among the most frequent issues, we can list accuses of cultural insensitivity and stereotyping, up to racism, missing credits or appropriation, disrespect for (vulnerable) groups or minorities.

When it comes to the third layer, the inappropriate use of religious images or symbols is the most important case. In the above examples, we have seen it in the case of Gucci and the Sikh community, as well as in Donata Meirelles's case, about the Candomblé folk religion. In fact, similar cases might be mentioned for other faiths. For instance, if we think of the Christian religion, images of Jesus, of Mary and other saints, or of religious ministers have been used in commercials in controversial ways that spurred debates (e.g. by Benetton, Robert Kalinkin, Marithe and Francois Girbaud, just to name a few). While extensive studies are missing on this, it seems that they did not ignite similar online discussions or apologies from the companies. Maybe because companies do not perceive their business to be threaten, and/or because of what Jenkins (2003) has called "The Last Acceptable Prejudice" referring to "The New Anti-Catholicism".



Figure 46–47 A piece of Versace T-shirt and Donatella Versace’s statement of apologies on Instagram Sources: www.businessoffashion.com/articles/china/versace-loses-chinese-brand-ambassador-amid-t-shirt-controversy, www.instagram.com/p/B1BNlAMInBo/

A recent case might help exemplify the issue. In 2019, the American art collective MSCHF customized Nike Air Max 97 sneakers inserting in the bubble water from the Jordan River and calling them “Jesus shoes”. While such pairs were using Christian religious symbols

and even a representation of the Vatican logo on the box, no official intervention by the company has been initially reported. Rather, the online debate might have “brought Nike good press, or at least an enormous amount of attention” (Ernest, 2021). In March 2021, the same collective has launched, in collaboration with the rapper Lil Nas X, a new customized version of the same Nike model, called “Satan shoes”, this time with a drop of human blood in the soles and related symbols, still referring to the Christian religion.

Contrary to the first case, Nike has decided very soon to file a trademark infringement lawsuit. In April 2021, BBC News reported that Nike won its lawsuit against the art collective MSCHF. The sneakers that were sold for \$1,018 were once again Nike Air Max 97s, this time modified with an inverted cross, a pentagram and the Gospel citation “Luke 10:18”. The 666 pairs made available from the art collective went sold out in less than a minute from launch, and all but one had already been shipped. MSCHF launched the shoes in coincidence with the launch of Lil Nas X’s latest song *Call Me By Your Name*. Each shoe also featured a signature Nike air bubble cushioning sole, containing red ink and a single drop of human blood, donated by members of the MSCHF art collective.

The fashion brand asked the New York federal court to stop MSCHF from selling the shoes and prevent it from using its famous Swoosh, and in the filing with the District Court it reported that “MSCHF and its unauthorised Satan Shoes are likely to cause confusion and dilution and create an erroneous association between MSCHF’s products and Nike” and that “There is already evidence of significant confusion and dilution occurring in the marketplace, including calls to boycott Nike in response to the launch of MSCHF’s Satan Shoes, based on the mistaken belief that Nike has authorised or approved this product”, MSCHF’s attorneys countered that the 666 pairs created were not typical sneakers, but rather individually-numbered works of art that were sold to collectors for \$1,018 each (*Nike wins court bid over ‘Satan Shoes’ with human blood*, 2021; *‘Satan Shoes’ to be recalled as Nike agrees to settle lawsuit*, 2021).

Siding with Nike, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order, even though MSCHF had indicated it had no intention of producing any additional pair of shoes. Nike

explained that the MSCHF art collective that made the “Satan Shoes” agreed to issue a voluntary recall as part of a legal settlement, resolving the trademark infringement lawsuit filed by Nike. No further details about the agreement, which also included the “Jesus Shoes” produced by MSCHF in 2019 also using the Air Max 97 as a base, have been made public (*Nike wins court bid over ‘Satan Shoes’ with human blood*, 2021; *‘Satan Shoes’ to be recalled as Nike agrees to settle lawsuit*, 2021).

Nike said in a statement that MSCHF modified the shoes without Nike’s permission, and that the company had nothing to do with the “Satan Shoes” or the “Jesus Shoes”. In any case, no official statement from the company has been found on social media.

2.6.2 Digital Media Conditions for Such Crises

It is now time to further reflect on the conditions of such online communication crises. The most important one, as already mentioned while introducing the localization topic, is the fact that contents published online are technically available to global audiences – hence unintended publics can access them and feel offended. However, this is not the only condition. A major component is linked to the amplification effect of social media, together with the easiness of posting, liking and sharing. Highly followed accounts are able to raise issues and point at problems, mobilizing their followers and, through them, triggering a snowball effect. *Ad-hoc* created hashtags (Karamalak & Cantoni, 2021) as well as digital activism campaigns can lead to major digital storms. The interconnectedness of the online world and its being active 24/7 allow communication crises to escalate very fast and require an immediate crisis management from concerned companies or individuals. Specific players might take the role of watchdogs or whistle-blowers, up to the point of becoming able to create storms even based on very thin reasons. The phenomenon of echo chambers or information bubbles (Cinelli et al., 2021) can play here a role as well. Crises might be amplified well beyond the original incident just because of the fast diffusion of similar messages within like-minded communities, communities that are almost “immune” from alternative views and interpretations, and not interested to in-depth analyze the cases at stake.

One more element has to be mentioned here: the persistency of digital media. As we have seen in some cases above, posts that might have been published several years earlier, maybe intended just for a few friends, or posts that people decided to remove because they changed their minds, can still be accessible and resurface the public debate in ways that were almost impossible in previous media. In some cases, a very severe censorship approach seems to find its way among the online debate, where there is no space for change, repentance or forgiveness ... A kind of social media Jacobinism seems to require the constant construction of enemies to be humiliated, fired, damned. In order to moderate the negative issues connected with the persistency of digital media, the “right to be forgotten” has been attracting more and more attention, being ruled for instance under the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (*Everything you need to know about the “Right to be forgotten”*, n.d.). However, “given competing interests and the hyper-connected nature of the Internet, the right to be forgotten is much more complicated than an individual simply requesting that an organization erase their personal data” (*Everything you need to know about the “Right to be forgotten”*, n.d) and is still very difficult, if not impossible, for individuals to get full erasure of their digital traces.

2.6.3 Is It Possible to Avoid Such Crises?

Inter-cultural comprehension and careful localization practices can help preventing possible misunderstandings and minimizing such crises. However, we should make here two further considerations, which suggest that crises cannot be avoided in all cases.

First, misinterpretation can happen also on purpose, for reasons different from a genuine defense and protection of a culture. For instance, someone might have interest in feeding online campaigns against competitors, so to damage their business in specific areas or with specific publics. Second, even if in most cases crises are not sought by companies, nor even anticipated, in other cases they might be planned, for political or other reasons. In fact, fashion media and companies are having more and more their own political agendas, hence leading to debates and conflicts (Ambás & Sádaba, 2021; Linfante, 2021; Motta &

Biagini, 2017). They might even expect that such online debates could benefit them, by attracting the admiration of like-minded prospects.

Third, cultures are very complex “entities”: what seems to be correctly localized and acceptable by some, could be considered still inadequate or even offensive by others. They are not crystallized and homogeneous positions, rather constantly changing and debated. A last case can help to shed light on this complexity and on the internal tensions within cultures: the case of the “Sauvage” campaign by Dior.

In August 2019, Dior released on its digital channels a Native American- inspired campaign for its Sauvage fragrance, but due to accusations of cultural appropriation and racism it removed it almost immediately (Lieber, 2019). The short video, directed by Jean-Baptiste Mondino, had as its main characters Johnny Depp, who is seen dressed in a poncho while playing a guitar in an attempt to “capture the spirit of Native Americans”, and a dancer in traditional native clothing, performing to the beat of a drum, followed by a narrator saying: “We are the earth. Dior” (Adegeest, 2019; Lieber, 2019).

The fashion house described the social media campaign as “an authentic journey deep into the Native American soul into sacred, foundational, centuries-old territory” (Fig. 48) (Bain, 2019) and explained that it had actively partnered with Americans for Indian



Figure 48 A screenshot of Dior ad on Twitter. Source: qz.com/quartz/1699531/dior-partnered-with-a-native-group-for-its-contentious-sauvage-ad/

Opportunity (AIO), an indigenous advocacy group, to produce the clip. Nevertheless, the backlash was almost immediate.

As stated by BoF and Fashion United, Dior later released a statement and the behind-the-scenes video-making to support its idea of building awareness of indigenous heritage and culture. The statement explains that the company is “very proud of this collaboration with AIO”, explaining that the organization was part of the ad campaign to “change the misperceptions about Native Americans, to share accurate American history, to build awareness about Native Americans as contemporary peoples and to promote Indigenous world-views”. Dior also stated: “As soon as we began to evoke Native American imagery and symbols in this new film, the House of Dior, Jean-Baptiste Mondino and Johnny Depp immediately decided to contact Native American consultants who are enrolled citizens of

the Comanche, Isleta and Taos Pueblos and the Pawnee Nation, with years of experience fighting cultural appropriation and promoting authentic inclusion” (Adegeest, 2019; Liber, 2019).

Despite the clarifications and despite the fact that Dior consulted with AIO to ensure that the campaign was culturally appropriate and not offensive, many social media users perceived it as racist for relating Native Americans alongside the fragrance name Sauvage, or Savage in English. The word in its French form was used to refer to French indigenous, while the English word might also have a racist connotation, since it is utilized in a derogative way to describe people of Native American descent (Adegeest, 2019; Anderson, 2019; Lieber, 2019).

On Twitter, the hashtag #NotYourSavage was coined by users to express their disappointment and criticism concerning the campaign. Among those who criticized the brand, one Twitter user stated, “Calling us Savage in a different language and accent doesn’t remove the long-standing historical violence and racism we continue to experience!” (Lieber, 2019).

Adrienne Keene, a Native American academic, writer and activist, who writes the popular blog *Native Appropriations* claimed on Twitter: “So the fact that ‘Sauvage’ is on some ‘we are the land’ BS is not surprising, but as always I find it deeply disturbing when brands force Native people to make the choice between stereotypes and misrepresentation, or utter invisibility” (Fig. 49) (Adrienne Keene, 2019).

The jewelry designer Kristen Dorsey, member of the Chickasaw tribe, expressed to BoF her disappointment concerning the Dior campaign, explaining that the brand’s choice annoyed her and many Native American artists like her, because, according to them, the company relied on tropes and stereotypes. Moreover, she stated: “It’s a classic example of the white men who come and take whatever from Native American culture that they want. That’s why it’s so offensive” (Lieber, 2019). She also highlighted that the company should have got in contact with other native designers and artists, who would have suggested Dior

to invoke modern Native American art, which does not rely on such stereotypes (Lieber, 2019).



Figure 49 Adrienne Keene’s post against Dior’s advertisement campaign Source: twitter.com/NativeApprops/status/1167468489642250243

Although Dior has put in place protocols to avoid these types of incidents, including working with representatives of the culture portrayed in the campaign, the combination of the fragrance name and the stereotypical imagery has angered many. Moreover, despite Depp has claimed some Native American origins (Cherokee or Creek), has been formally adopted by the Comanche tribe in 2012 due to his performance in *The Lone Ranger* and he has received the Comanche language name of Mah-Woo-Meh (“Shape Shifter”), Dior was criticized by some users for having chosen a non-native American testimonial. Finally, the choice to never mention the collaboration with AIO within the social media ad campaign may have exacerbated the backlash (Friedman, 2019a; Weinberg, 2019).

After the clamor, AIO organization initially released a statement noting: “The goals of Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) for providing consultations on media productions are to ensure inclusion of paid Native staff, artists, actors, writers, etc., to educate the production teams on Native American contemporary realities and to create allies for Indigenous peoples. AIO does not speak for all Native Americans. We are proud to have successfully achieved our goals of education and inclusion for this project with Parfums Christian Dior” (Friedman, 2019a). Shortly afterwards, on Instagram it disclaimed its involvement stating, “Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) deeply regrets its participation in the Dior campaign ... AIO takes responsibility for our actions

and has much to learn from this unfortunate set of events ...” (Fig. 50) (Americansforindianopportunity, 2019). Dior decided to erase the video campaign from Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube and to only utilize print stills, featuring Johnny Depp, and removed the Native American contribution (Adegeest, 2019; Friedman, 2019a; Lieber, 2019).

On September 13th, the company released a statement saying “The House of Dior has long been committed to promoting diversity and has no tolerance for discrimination in any form. Recently, a film trailer for the Sauvage fragrance was posted on social media and immediately withdrawn. We are deeply sorry for any offense caused by this new advertising campaign, which was meant to be a celebration of the beauty, dignity, and grace of the contemporary Native American culture. As a consequence, we have decided not to release this version of the campaign” (Friedman, 2019a).

This last case shows how fashion-related communication can be seen as a relevant field where cultures are being discussed: due to their high visibility within popular culture, they provide opportunities for interested parties to highlight a culture’s importance, its values and characteristics, at the same time, those elements are being negotiated and co-created within the debate ...

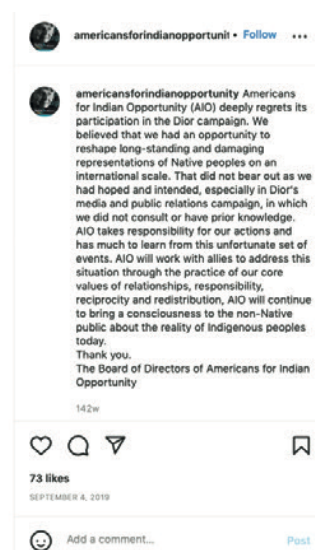


Figure 50 Americansforindianopportunity's statement. Source: www.instagram.com/p/B2AJXUxljIV/

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15. Conclusions

This dissertation has addressed and answered the following three main research questions:

15.1 What is online localization in fashion?

Fashion brands mainly conceive localization as a mere technical adaptation of some functionalities of a website, eCommerce, social media or web page.

As per eCommerce depending on the business model (fast fashion, jewelry, luxury, sports, underwear, etc.), fashion companies have a preference to localize some elements rather than others. In general, companies tend to localize according to the economic value of a given market. The elements that fashion companies prefer in terms of localization and adaptation are language and product descriptions, calendars and festivities, currency and payment methods, geographical location and the size chart. More debated, however, is the issue of seasonality and product adaptation, which are usually taken into account by sports brands and fast fashion brands but not considered by luxury, jewelry and underwear brands. Models' localization rarely occurs since companies favor greater inclusivity. In general, localization on eCommerce pages is used to place products in the market more appropriately, and therefore the greater the localization of the above aspects, the more effective the strategy appears to be.

As per social media localization, it can be concluded that for fashion brands, they are mostly used to communicate brands' soul and identity; therefore, most companies are willing to use one global voice to maintain a certain brand consistency. However, this aspect does not apply to all brands and all markets. Companies from China and/or South Korea tend to prefer one-to-one communication also on social media, using local platforms and tailor-made communication strategies. Moreover, from the case study related to the Caruso company the importance for some fashion companies to emphasize on their social media the origin of the brand and the cultural values and stereotypes of the country of origin has emerged.

According to Serdari (2020) the world of fashion implies constant change and transformation tackling three different dimensions: time, space, and the individual; Adequate localization choices enable the various fashion players to implement strategies in a way that the three above-mentioned dimensions are considered and continuously stimulated and adapted based also on new technologies and market needs.

15.2 Compared to the general definitions of localization provided in previous studies, has the concept evolved over time? How?

In general, this dissertation reveals that the general concept of localization should be broadened. Scholars and practitioners can no longer define it as a “cultural translation” (Mele et al., 2016) or “the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets” (Fry & Lommel, 2003: 13)

Localization can be defined as a cultural translation that considers not only the national boundaries of the countries with which one interfaces, but also takes into consideration subcultures, minorities, and in general the diversity of various groups, and also considers the temporality of the choices that are made by various stakeholders. Moreover, localization can no longer be considered as a process that takes into account the mere spatial adaptation but should also consider the temporal aspect. In this sense, events such as the Covid19 pandemic or the Black Lives Matter movement have placed an emphasis on this aspect. For many fashion brands “a before and after” such events have existed at the level of communication and localization strategies.

Another aspect to be considered is the phenomenon of “reverse localization”: many brands on their social media accounts tend to emphasize the company’s own geographic place of origin and bring stereotypes or certain distinctive features of their culture of origin to the user’s attention. Thus, “reverse localization” can be defined as a reversal by brands with respect to content localization, since, through this strategy, they choose to send a univocal message that represents not only their brand identity but also the culture of the country of origin, the stereotypes associated with it, and the geographical origin of the brand.

15.3 In the digital environment, can a lack of or erroneous localization generate crises? Of which kind?

Finally, the thesis confirms how a lack of superficial or erroneous localization can lead to communication crises.

Fashion plays an active role in shaping the outside world, integrating itself into the sphere of culture and influencing fields such as art, music, photography, film, sports, media, museums, tourism and business. The world of fashion is no longer seen as an ancillary element of culture, but it has transformed from “ugly duckling” to a swan, increasingly

occupying a central role in the cultural landscape. The interest of the general public in fashion is also demonstrated by the presence and continuous expansion of fashion capitals such as London, Milan, New York and Paris. Fashion weeks and districts have become major attractions for the general public, as well as fashion museums such as the Palais Galliera Museum, the Museum Dior Granville, the Yves Saint Laurent Museum, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, the Armani Silos, the Musée Atelier Audemars Piguet, etc. (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

The processes of digital transformation have contributed to influence and further accelerate this fashion (r)evolution. They have made possible to shorten the distances between nations and have provided a global echo to fashion communication. However, as in a mirror, cultural misunderstandings have been equally amplified, leading to various communication crises within the fashion industry.

What is culturally acceptable for a certain audience may not be acceptable to another, depending on different cultural backgrounds. Hence the importance and need for a sound localization strategy, or cultural translation. In this direction, opposite but indicative examples are Caruso's choice to represent Italian stereotypes within its fashion films (positively received by the audience) versus Dolce & Gabbana's choice to represent Chinese and Italian stereotypes within the Great Show launch campaign (negatively received by the Chinese audience).

In this thesis, the presentation of different types of crises, and reflections on their own reasons, demonstrates the importance of an effort to take care of different cultures and approaches within the new digital media (eco)system. Moreover, it shows how fashion - as an integral part of each individual's life and culture is becoming a place where culture itself is discussed, debated, defended, and (re)negotiated among different stakeholders (Noris & Cantoni, 2022a).

In general, this dissertation has not only contributed to answering the three research questions but it has also provided insights in the development of the field of digital fashion with a focus on digital transformation, which has taken place and still is in the field of digital communication.

In addition, the thesis has contributed to expanding the variety of methodologies that can be used for the study of digital communication in fashion. In particular, the choice of primarily using qualitative methodologies has allowed a deeper reflection on the issues being analyzed and a richness of detail that would not have been possible with a purely quantitative analysis.

Moreover, although the world of digital fashion is closely interconnected with marketing and customer experience, in this dissertation it was chosen to analyze the phenomenon of localization by taking into consideration the experience of companies through the analysis of their eCommerce pages and social media and through interviews with managers involved in the localization process, and not to consider only the perspective of the end consumer, which is typical of studies in marketing.

15.4 Managerial Implications

This doctoral dissertation provides an academic contribution with respect to the development of fields such as online communication, intercultural communication, and fashion communication and their intersecting and it complements each field by studying digital transformation in fashion and its effects when it comes to localization strategies and crises communication.

It highlights possible managerial implications from which companies could benefit. First and foremost, thanks to this dissertation, fashion companies and particularly managers developing localization strategies receive insights on how to implement a successful strategy whether it involves eCommerce platforms or social media. It allows managers to reflect on which aspects should necessarily be localized, which can be localized according to the fashion sector they belong to, and which would be better not to localize. In addition, the thesis places emphasis on some of the major endogenous communication crises that have occurred in the fashion world. Through the study, description, and analysis of these cases, managers receive additional food for thought to ensure that further cultural crises would be avoided and in case they would still happen, despite precautions, deal with them in the best possible way, without further damaging the reputation of the company involved. Finally, the thesis also considers the Covid19 crisis and provides insights for managers on how to act promptly from a communication perspective to reduce the risks and possible

reputational damages that can occur when exogenous (external) crises such as precisely a global pandemic arise.

15.5 Future Research and Limitations

The thesis has also limitations to be highlighted. First, the research could be further expanded and consider more quantitative methodologies; second other cultural frameworks than Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2010) could be considered; third, in the social media section of the analysis more social media channels could be considered in order to assess if there are substantial differences in terms of communication and localization strategies; fourth, future studies could also take into account the consumers' perspective and therefore research such as focus groups, interviews, or questionnaires could be conducted to better understand what is the perception of localization from a customer view point. Another option could be to carry out experiments, for example, with eye-tracking technologies to determine whether and how the localization of some specific elements is crucial to provide a better customer experience, especially when it comes to eCommerce.

A further development could be related to the concept of "Made in" and how it is used by fashion and lifestyle brands on a comparative level, considering different countries and also its effects on the consumer behavior.

Another possible further research stream is related to the study of cross-cultural crises generated online. A model that would classify each type of crisis could be created to enable a deeper understanding of the issue and to enable a thorough understanding of aspects related to intercultural communication to avoid crises or, in case they occur, to address them promptly.

Research Goal		
Understand how digital transformation is impacting on localization and intercultural communication within fashion		
Research Questions		
What is online localization in fashion?	Compared to the general definitions of localization provided in previous	In the digital environment, can a lack of or an erroneous localization generate crises? of which kind?

	studies, has the concept evolved over time? how?	
Methodology		
Semi-structured qualitative interviews; Content analysis; Grounded theory; Thematic analysis; Digital analytics	Semi-structured qualitative interviews; Grounded theory	Semi-structured qualitative interviews; Content analysis
Outcomes		
a. Localization is mainly conceived by fashion brands as a technical adaptation b. Localization seems to be more effective on eCommerce rather than on social media c. Technical localization rather than cultural adaptation is preferred by fashion companies	a. Localization should not only take into account national cultures but also subcultures, minorities, the diversity of various groups, and the temporality of the choices that are made by various stakeholders b. “Reverse localization” is emerging as a strategy	a. A lack of, superficial, or erroneous localization can lead to communication crises b. An effort to take care of different cultures and approaches within the new digital media (eco)system is required to avoid crises or to overcome them c. Crises can be connected to culture, cult and agriculture
Research Contribution		

Development of the academic field of digital fashion; (re)definition of the concept of localization; study and analysis of intercultural crisis cases related to the topic of online localization
Managerial Implications
Provide digital fashion stakeholders with insights to be able to implement a successful localization or reverse localization strategy and avoid intercultural communication crises
Limitations and Future Research
Implementation of quantitative methods for the study of the topic; other cultural frameworks than Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2010) could be considered; analysis of the topic taking into consideration the consumer and not only the strategic-managerial perspective; creation of a classification model of intercultural crises and further comparative studies on the concept of “Made in” involving other countries and brands

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