Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

Social Analysis

Volume 12, 2022

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Scientia Publishing House

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Social Analysis **is indexed by the following main databases:**

Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL)
DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals)
EBSCO Discovery Service
Index Copernicus
Ulrich's Periodicals Directory/ulrichsweb

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 1–27

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0001

Changing Landscapes but Ingrained Power Relations? The Green Promise of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the (Un)sustainability of the Fashion Industry, and the Central-Eastern European Production Background

Emese DOBOS
Centre for Economic and Regional Studies Institute of World Economics, Budapest, Hungary
Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary
dobos.emese@krtk.hu

Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic turned the spotlight on the inequalities and the vulnerability of the global supply chains. It showed the serious dependency and the asymmetrical power relations among the stakeholders of the fashion industry. The relocation tendencies – as fashion brands are trying to break up with Asia and move production closer – have already started, and the pandemic can give a boost to it. The Central-Eastern European region can be a possible destination. The shorter supply chains are not just a tool for resilience but are told to serve sustainability as well. My hypothesis is that even though the geography of fashion industry is changing, power relations are not, and the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic has even increased dependency among the different players. Power relations are important among the region's production and the clients if relocation is to work out, as there is need for inclusive, fair, and decent employment, which is rarely guaranteed by fashion brands. Without it, sustainability cannot be achieved. In this paper, I focus on the examination of socio-economic processes in contemporary fashion such as the relocation tendencies and the power relations among the stakeholders, mainly fashion brands and production companies as subcontractors of the fashion industry. Especially, I examine profit and risk as factors within the relations. The critical essay uses literature review and document analysis to investigate a possible change in the current role of power relations and to examine the hypothesis.

Keywords: relocation, fashion industry, supply chain, power relations

Introduction

While the fashion industry seems to be glamorous and spectacular, it has a hidden, quite ugly side. This industry's outputs are fashionable clothes and accessories, and there are fascinating, theatrical fashion shows besides piece-of-art shop windows. The invisible side appears in the form of a notoriously opaque, impenetrable supply chain, human and labour rights violation, and exploitation. In this article, I focus on contradictory relations: the "visible" geography of fashion production and the invisible dimension of fashion, the power relations between the "top" and the "bottom" of the fashion supply chain. I examine especially profit and risk between the different levels and actors within the fashion industry within the framework of Gary Gereffi's global value chain theory. I explore how the current period – namely the COVID-19-pandemic-caused disruption – can affect fashion industry's geography, the location of production, and relations among different stakeholders, with a main focus on suppliers and buyers.[1]

The production of textiles, garments, shoes, leather and fur goods has been moving away from developed countries for the last three decades: fashion brands went through internationalization and have outsourced their low-cost production activities mostly to South-East Asia (Gereffi–Frederick 2010, Caniato et al. 2015). Essentially, the labour-intensive processes were delocalized in the European Union, and an increase of relocation was witnessed from the 2000s regarding more technological or more capital-intensive units of the textile industry, accompanied by a new migration of high labour-intensive activities out of the new Member States to other cheaper places such as Belarus and Ukraine (Györffi–Oren 2006). As the fashion industry operates on a global level, my approach represents a world economics aspect, with an outlook on the Central-Eastern European region as an alternative to Asia and a possible destination for relocation.

Relocation tendencies – as fashion brands are trying to abandon Asia and move production closer – are one of the latest geographical, socio-economic changes within fashion industry's production, as fashion companies are now having second thoughts about the benefits of the former delocation of their production to mainly developing Asian countries with low labour cost (Robinson–Hsieh 2016). Relocation has started before the pandemic, which has possibly accelerated it further. We still cannot declare it as a determining phenomenon coming before the dominant outsourcing. A growing scientific literature and consulting firms' reports are examining the factors, triggers, and advantages of relocation, as

1 The term "buyer" in the paper refers to the fashion brands (or their representatives) who act as buyers and main clients of manufacturers. According to Gereffi (1994), buyers refer to large retailers and brand-name companies that buy but do not make the goods they sell. The term "consumers" (someone who consumes a product) and customers (someone who purchases, buys a product) refers to the end users.

fashion brands can benefit from proximity of production to their markets as well as technology development (BOF and McKinsey & Company 2019). Another trigger for relocation is that the fashion industry has reached a crossroads where speed beats marginal cost advantages and sustainability concerns are getting stronger. Traditional fashion supply chains are facing challenges due to convergent labour costs. Transportation is also significant and closely connected to speed: sea transport is the most common within fashion, but this takes time: around 30 days are required for a parcel to reach Western European markets from Asia, and air transport is considered to be too expensive (Andersson et al. 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic turned the spotlight on the inequalities and the vulnerabilities of the global supply chains. It showed the serious dependency and the asymmetrical power relations among the stakeholders of the fashion industry. The shorter supply chains are not just a tool for resilience but told to serve sustainability as well.

In this article, I focus on the examination of socio-economic processes in contemporary fashion, mainly the relocation tendencies and the power relations among the stakeholders, fashion brands and production companies as subcontractors of the fashion industry. Especially, I examine profit and risk as factors within the relations. The critical essay relies on the analysis of secondary literature, including literature review and document analysis as well as some primary (industry) sources to investigate a possible change in the current role of power relationships and to examine the theoretical proposition. I examine the geography of production and the power relations along the supply chain, and then I turn my attention to the exploration of profit and risk and to how COVID-19 and the relocation tendencies affected it besides the discussion of the (un)sustainability of the fashion industry.

"The Chain Is Just as Strong as Its Weakest Link": The Global Value Chain of the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is one of the most globalized industries (Bonacich–Appelbaum 2000), with a notoriously opaque supply chain. The garment industry is characterized by "far-flung subcontracting networks [which] are managed with varying degrees of closeness by designers, retailers and other brand-name firms that market, but do not necessarily make, the products that are sold under their label" (Bair 2005: 159). But within the highly fragmented supply chain with dominantly outsourced production, the power relations remain hidden, leaving big inequalities among the different actors. The theoretical framework of my paper connects to the multi-disciplinary global value chain (GVC) theory that focuses on the globally expanding supply chains and on how value is created and

captured therein. The multinational corporations as the lead firms orchestrate the multi-tiered global supply chain (Castañeda-Navarrete et al. 2021). The theory considers that the cause of inequalities lies in the way of how construction is organized, and the internal power asymmetry provides different opportunities for position and profit making.

As fashion can be considered to be an oligopolistic system with the dominance of a few leading firms, discussion of governance – that is closely connected to power – is crucial. Governance is the top-down view that focuses mainly on lead firms and the organization of global industries. The top-down approach of governance shows how corporate power and authority relationships can actively shape the distribution of profits and risks in an industry, determines how financial, material, and human resources are allocated and flow within the chain, and identifies the actors who exercise such power. The apparel (or garment)[2] industry is an illustrative example for the "buyer-driven" supply chains, where retailers and marketers of final products exert the most power through their ability to shape mass consumption via dominant shares. They are strong brand names who source their products from a global network of suppliers in cost-effective locations to make their goods. Fashion brands are "manufacturers without factories", with the physical production of goods separated from the design and marketing (Gereffi 2013). Because of their direct contact with final consumers, global buyers manage the supply chain from a position of greater strength with respect to suppliers (Richero–Ferrigno 2016). In our case, the buyers are well-known: they are those household-name fashion brands who are the retailers of the products widely present in basically every shopping street and shopping mall around the world. And at the other end of the value chain, there is the garment industry. The production background with the cut-make-trim activities – with its high need of live labour – meant often the first step and the beginning of industrialization (Fukunishi–Yamagata 2014) and a key driver of export-led industrialization and economic development in several countries (Castañeda-Navarrete et al. 2021). Fashion – textile and garment production – has long been key for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and other developing countries to attract investment and enter a manufacturing sector capable of diversifying economic growth and providing employment for large numbers of a semi-skilled workforce (Richero–Ferrigno 2016).

How does the apparel GVC looks like? The global apparel value chain can be described as consisting of several networks: raw material networks, component networks (textile companies producing fabric, synthetic fibres, etc.), production

2 Some works of literature use garment, some others apparel, and yet others clothing industry. Garment originally refers to a single piece to clothing. Apparel refers to a collection of clothing, that is, more than one piece. In this paper, I use garment and apparel as synonyms for the industry segments that produce clothes.

networks (apparel manufacturers), export networks (brand-name apparel companies, overseas buying offices, trading companies), and marketing networks (e.g. department stores) as well (Gereffi–Memedemovic 2003). As a single fashion collection consists of hundreds of different garments and accessories, bigger retailers are working with hundreds and thousands of different suppliers.

While the fashion industry is widely extensive geographically, regarding to power, it follows the logic of oligopoly. An oligopoly is a market structure with the domination of a small number of firms. According to State of Fashion 2019 (BOF and McKinsey & Company 2019), the top 20 companies in the industry account for 97 percent of economic profit, and their headquarters are also located in a few countries, with the dominance of the USA and Western Europe. Money follows power and vice versa: inequalities, not just in power relations but in welfare as well, the income of top managers, CEOs, and the fashion workers are also widely common, but that is not a characteristic specific to the fashion industry, as it can be widely witnessed among several industries as well. While a huge numbers of garment workers are not even paid enough for a decent standard of living and millions are paid only just over the minimum wage (Global Fashion Agenda and The Boston Consulting Group 2017), the highest-paid fashion executives' salaries have continued to grow even during the pandemic (Clark 2021).

The headquarters of the biggest buyer is important, as these are the ones that are recognized as "fashion creators", or "author countries". Geography plays a crucial role in the fashion industry, as clothing brands are associated with specific countries and cities. The geography of fashion is also associated with the so-called fashion capitals in the most implicit way. According to Godart (2014), there is a current "oligarchic" structure of fashion that emerged in the 20th century and that is still predominant and rarely questioned even though in many realms – such as financial and international relations – new players have emerged. In terms of geography and fashion, the location of an activity must not be understood only as the location of manufacturing but rather as the location of the decision-making centres, the global centres of power (the fashion capitals). After – and since – the Second World War, only a couple of cities are reviewed and thought to be influential fashion centres. They are called to be the fashion capitals, or the "Big Four": London, Paris, Milan, and New York are the oligarchs of fashion.[3] These cities have their own identity (in fashion, it refers to a certain aesthetics and style as well), enjoy specific symbolism and a significant economic position as well. The recognition of an "author country", however, is part of a process of renegotiating hierarchies and roles according to the contexts and players concerned (Segre Reinach 2009 – quoted by Skov 2003). It is clearly not in the interest of the current

3 While formerly I have described "fashion oligarchy" as the financial dominance of the leading firms, Godart refers to cities as oligarchs – namely the so-called "Big Four" – within the fashion industry.

fashion capitals and the headquarters of the biggest buyers to let others emerge, as they are in power and position to make it (not) happen.

The suppliers (fashion production companies) are usually independent firms who produce garments for several fashion brands at the same time. Within the fashion industry, ownership (of own production facilities), strategic partnerships, and subsidiaries are quite rare (Antalóczy–Sass 1998). This practice is in line with the nature of dynamically changing fashion trends and the fast novatory supply, as fashion brands (who mainly function as the main retailers) can easily move their production following the needs in the technology and specialization of their products and the changes within the economic and business environment.

Where Is the CEE Region's Place in the Global Garment Value Chain?

The European Union is the second largest exporter after China in textile and clothing (WTO 2021a). 38% of the total textile and clothing turnover is sold on global markets. There is a big difference among the EU Member States' contribution to the EU fashion industry. CEE economies are strongly integrated into GVCs, but the firms in these countries have not yet caught up with their western counterparts in terms of value-added capture (Pellényi 2020). From the 1990s, the basis of the collaboration between Western and Eastern European countries' fashion industry was the so-called outward processing trade (OPT) practice: contractors transported semi-processed products, such as fabrics, cuttings, or semi-finished products, to low-wage subcontractors in Eastern Europe for assembly and intermediate work processes (Hanzl–Pavlik 2003). In the context of fashion production, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia are among the most representative countries of this region (Faust 2005). So, lower-value-added, labour-intensive production is taking place in CEE countries. After the 2004 and 2007 enlargement, when Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Latvia and then Bulgaria and Romania have joined the European Union, the OPT practice has remained. The EU's regulation in force regarding the Country of Origin (COO) does not make it compulsory to use the "Made in Europe" label if a product is made within the EU's borders, nor does it inhibit the use of a single, specific country. It is definitely in the interest of the fashion brands located in fashion capitals to sign a high-prestige country as country of origin (Barna–Dobos-Nagy 2021). According to the European Commission's data, the biggest producers in the industry are Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and Portugal. Together they account for about three-quarters of the EU's production. Southern EU countries contribute more to total clothing production, whilst northern countries, such as Germany,

Belgium, the Netherlands, and Austria, contribute more to textile production, notably technical textiles (European Commission 2021). That does not mention the CEE countries particularly. But with the current COO regulation, it is not clear where those products are actually made or "just" labelled as of Italian or French origin (Barna–Dobos-Nagy 2021).

According to the concept of Wallerstein's core-periphery model referring to geographical inequalities, Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet successor states and the Balkan countries, are on the semi-periphery, and so the outsourcing activity of fashion brands has targeted these countries. The smiling curve theory explains how value is created within production. There is a functional hierarchy within the fashion industry too, where assembly (cut-make-trim) activities are the lowest value-added activities (Goto 2012). But while CEE countries are in an interim position from this point of view, if we look at value addition and where value is generated in GVCs, the manufacturing of actual garments is considered to be the lowest-value-added, labour-intensive, as fashion production companies of the region are subcontractors of European fashion brands, from premium through high-end (Arbutina 2017) to haute couture creations (Dobos 2020).

The recognition of geography in fashion is important regarding prestige. Local industry's economic perspectives and geographical inequalities can be described by the dual economic structure of the dominance of foreign, capital-rich, export-oriented big firms and the local small and medium-sized firms, who are suffering from lack of competence and capital (Molnár 2021). I also argue that the importance and significance of the fashion industry cannot be measured by economic importance, sales, and volume or revenue within the country, as it can be a very significant employer among female workers, ethnic minorities, migrant people with disabilities, and people from rural areas as well (Molnár 2017). Most of the time, the fact that even luxury products can be made in CEE countries remains hidden, with the exception of a few cases when these hidden relations of production catch the attention of the world press: e.g. *EXCLUSIVE – Revealed: Stella McCartney's £1,545 coat worn by Duchess of Sussex at Remembrance Day service is made by impoverished Hungarian factory workers earning just £2.60 PER HOUR* (Vivek et al. 2019); *Revealed: The Romanian Site Where Louis Vuitton Makes Its Italian Shoes* (Lembke 2017) – to mention but a few headlines. These press coverages mainly express compassion and represent Western "standards" of living rather than accept the hard job of the CEE region's fashion workers.

Power Relations in Fashion: Bargaining Power and Dependency, Profit and Risk

In the fashion industry, the profit comes "from combinations of high-value research, design, sales, marketing, and financial services that allow the retailers, designers and marketers to act as strategic brokers in linking overseas factories and traders with product niches in their main consumer markets" (Gereffi–Memedemovic 2003: 3). Outsourcing production functions as a risk avoidance to the buyer, as it does not have to deal with any risks or costs associated with the labour processes such as a possible unionization of workers or wage pressure. A report from the academic research and advocacy organization at the New York University Stern School of Business, the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights, also turned the spotlight on the fact – and the practice of the fashion industry – that several fashion companies are working together with subcontractors' subcontractors, and so, eventually, fashion brands and actual producers have no direct relationship (Barret et al. 2018). Leading firms, mainly based in the US and the European Union (EU), capture around 70% of the final retail price of apparel products (Frederick 2015 – quoted by Castañeda-Navarrete et al. 2021). The example given by the labour rights and fair fashion advocate organization Fashion Revolution illustrates well the cost breakdown of a 29$ T-shirt: in this case, the manufacturing cost (3.40 €) and the factory margin (1.15 €) together amount to 4.45 €, which is little more than 15% of the final consumer price where the biggest margin (17 €) goes for the retail stakeholder (Fashion Revolution 2017).

According to Shaw (2002), 11.2 million formal and an estimated 35 million informal jobs are in the garment industry, mostly in developing countries. This segment means an important livelihood for them. But how can we define risk? If risk is an exposure to danger, the most threatened ones are those who are at the end of the whole supply chain: the workers, formal and informal altogether. Without the pandemic, low wages and hazardous working conditions also exist within the fashion industry, so the workers in the global value chain are not only highly vulnerable to exploitative working conditions, but the pandemic also threatens their livelihood. Informal workers are also excluded from social assistance and from any form of social security.

There is an inverse proportionality: the marketers bear the biggest profit and producers the biggest risk, as in the factories where textiles, garments, shoes, leather, and accessories are produced, millions of people toil in insecure, low-wage jobs, under unsafe conditions (IndustriALL 2020). The asymmetry of power here is putting all the risk on the suppliers and, by extension, the workers. The "orthodox" world-systems theory refers to the interregional and transnational division of labour, which divides the world into core countries, semi-periphery

countries, and periphery countries. The core countries are the industrialized capitalist countries on which periphery and semi-periphery countries depend; they focus on higher-skill, capital-intensive production, and the rest of the world focuses on low-skill, labour-intensive production and extraction of raw materials. The periphery countries are less developed than the core countries or the semi-periphery countries whose position is between the core and the periphery (Wallerstein 1976). While the theory focuses on differences between countries, not just outsourced production but local sourcing can be devastating socially and economically for domestic suppliers, as core, semi-periphery, and periphery can also exist within the borders, within the positions of different (manufacturing) companies in the supply chain. Even if Italy can be considered to be a core country (Dunn et al. 2000), according to the world-systems theory – and an "author country or fashion creator" by Godart –, low-cost, exploitative manufacturing can be taken place there as well. Italy is a case in point, as there is a huge number of "Italian–Chinese" companies who disrupted the legally operating Italian production companies, and even informal work can be spotted in the higher market segment of the garment industry, at the luxury level as well. A decreasing lead time (the total time required to produce a garment or accessories before shipment of the order) has facilitated the breaking down of manufacturing and distribution among a number of different subcontractors, while depressed prices have fostered informal labour conditions (Paton–Lazazzera 2018).

While the effect of the pandemic was widely reported and examined by press and numerous NGOs in Southeast Asia, this attention neglected the CEE region, which is equally at the bottom of the value chain. A joint survey among Hungarian fashion companies done in March 2020 by the Hungarian Society of Textile Technology and Science (TMTE) and the Association of Hungarian Light Industry (MKSZ) reported that three quarters of the companies are preparing for a more than 50% loss in their yearly production in 2020, and 60% of them had to lay off half of their employees (TMTE and MKSZ 2020). This result is in parallel with the conclusion of the European forecasting and the results of The European Apparel and Textile Confederation (EURATEX) survey, as companies expect a 50% drop in sales and production and 80% of them are already laying off workers. Finally, the confederation predicts the closure of every fourth European fashion company (EURATEX 2020).

Generally, garment production companies are caught in a vice in terms of profit: while their costs (the minimum wage, for example) are rising, their margin is getting smaller. As the CEO of a Hungarian garment manufacturing company told: "Formerly, the multiplier between the production cost (of a garment) and the final retail price was 2.5. Now it is getting bigger and bigger" (Dobos 2019).[4]

4 Original text in Hungarian (translated into English by the author).

> Setting the price is always the result of the price negotiation between the buyer and the production company (intermediate agents can be included). However, over 90% of workers in the global garment industry have no possibility to negotiate on their wages and conditions and so are not able to claim their fair share of the value that they generate (IndustriALL 2015).

In terms of putting pressure (during price negotiation) on Central-Eastern European fashion companies working for Italian brands, the clients are referring to "Italian–Chinese" companies who work with half the hourly rate [of Italian companies], and they receive compliments on their work speed and quality. But in addition to Italian manufacturers, they are also competing with Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian ones. This is only possible by not declaring every worker or having them do an enormous amount of unpaid overtime (Barna–Dobos-Nagy 2021). The negotiation process and mentioning cheaper rivals is also an indirect threat that shows the power of the buyer. Thus, due to competitive pressure, producer and manufacturing companies are not in the position of bargaining. Buyers set the prices, having no regard for any of the production company's interests. From time to time, the case of working conditions and exploited labour reaches the attention of the public, and fashion brands are usually spreading their hands "helplessly" and want to save their image, saying they had no knowledge of the case, because they worked with the company through contractors and had no direct relationship with the factory. "But at the same time, they communicate the expectation regarding the hourly rate towards the subcontractor, so they push [production] in this direction themselves. Everything has a price, they know what costs, how much, and where, the price is dictated by the buyer" (Barna–Dobos-Nagy 2021).

How (Un)sustainable Is the Fashion Industry?

The fashion industry is considered to be a big polluter and a relevant contributor to climate change.[5] Most of the people may associate sustainability with the protection of the environment and eliminating pollution. The most discussed and best-known sustainability issues of fashion are carbon emission, water consumption and pollution, environmental and micro-plastic pollution, and

5 The statement "fashion is the second biggest polluting industry" is one of the most widely used and quoted fake news, as Vanessa Friedman wrote in her 2018 article for the New York Times (source: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/fashion/fashion-second-biggest-polluter-fake-news.html), and, unfortunately, it is still used in the scientific literature. The reliability of the currently used data, the misinformation within the industry, and the questioning of the significance of its pollution enjoy a growing interest and are examined by several scholars and institutes (e.g. the New Standard Institute or Transformers Foundation).

waste generation (McFall-Johnsen 2020). But there is an aspect of sustainability that is widely neglected in terms of commitment: social sustainability. The three pillars of sustainability were first developed by Kahn (1995): besides the environmental and economic, there is a third dimension, social sustainability, which is characterized by equity, empowerment, accessibility, participation/sharing, cultural identity, and institutional stability. The latter is rarely discussed and connected to the sustainability issues of the fashion industry. While fashion press loves to applaud fashion brands' efforts towards sustainability and speaks about a "shift in mindset" (Cernansky 2021a), it still covers the deep inequalities and the systematic problems in terms of transparency. "Green" initiatives are more focused on climate change contribution rather than on sustainability in its original sense, with the three pillars. Last year, during the COP26, fashion also reached the agenda of high politics, but the result was rather just scratching the surface, as industry actors pledged an increased ambition for emission reduction, a more substantive role of communication, and increased use of "environmentally-preferred" materials (Cernansky 2021b).

In the scientific literature, sustainable fashion is not used as a factual concept, discourses are led by different ideologies, processes, and characteristics (Kozlowski et al. 2018), while in social sciences sustainable fashion is often described as an alternative to fast fashion (Clark 2008). Thomas (2019) described sustainable fashion as an amorphous category, and the author emphasized regarding sustainability and fashion that there are remarkable varieties across the fashion industry as to how people working in the industry define and operationalize sustainability.

The previous period, marked by the COVID-19 global pandemic, has brought unprecedented times, changes, and circumstances for the whole world, and, naturally, the fashion industry could not stay untouched. The pandemic further emphasized the need for sustainability, which became the central topic of fashion industry's latest initiatives and commitments. One of the most "visible" disruptions was witnessed in the supply chain of the fashion industry: millions were at the risk of losing their jobs due to factory closures and unpaid deliveries. By visibility, I understand the documentation of the devastation at the end of the supply chain by brave fashion workers and dedicated activists, which was (is) widely covered by the mainstream media as well.[6] That is in parallel with the fact that most of the people do not know where, how, and by whom their clothes are made.[7] The greener

6 The Clean Clothes Campaign, garment industry's largest alliance of labour unions and non-governmental organizations, dedicated a live blog to the demonstration of the garment workers' situation. Available at: https://cleanclothes.org/news/2021/live-blog-on-how-the-coronavirus-influences-workers-in-supply-chains.

7 With "who make our clothes", I refer to the famous slogan of the global campaign of the Fashion Revolution movement established after the notorious disaster of the Rana Plaza in 2013 and its call for transparency along the supply chain of the fashion industry.

steps of the fashion industry are mostly based on voluntary commitments by global companies without any sanctions for not delivering.

Furthermore, there is a blurred definition circulating among customers[8] who do not know what sustainability means (Heiny–Schneider 2021). It is also in line with the findings of the US-based Genomatica's survey on sustainable fashion: a lack of availability and trustworthy information on what makes clothing more (or less) sustainable has made "sustainable fashion" elusive for many. More than 70% of consumers have heard of environmental sustainability issues in the fashion industry, listing excess consumption, carbon emissions, and water pollution from dyeing processes as issues they are aware of. 38% of them are aware of sustainability issues in fashion but only became aware of them over the past year (Genomatica 2021).[9] While we can argue the results' applicability to a global, general public, US-based findings are in line with the latest results of the Fashion Revolution Consumer Survey (2021):[10] 75% of people agreed that fashion brands should do more to improve the lives of the women making their clothes, 69% of people would like to know how their clothes were manufactured, and 37% of respondents said it was important that the clothing they bought had been produced without using harmful chemicals for the consumer (Fashion Revolution 2021b).

The not-for-profit global movement, Fashion Revolution publishes the so-called *Transparency Index*: makers of the index review and rank 250 of the world's largest fashion brands and retailers according to what information they disclose about their social and environmental policies, practices, and impacts, in their operations and supply chain. Their key findings are that still only 47% of brands disclose their manufacturing facilities. Major brands and retailers publicly disclosed the most information about their policies, commitments, and processes on human rights and environmental topics in 2021 and significantly less about the results, outcomes, and impacts of their efforts (Fashion Revolution 2021a). Without a critical and reliable revision of what brands "let us know", we cannot take their reports as granted.

8 The research, conducted by Heiny and Schneider (2021), was based on a deep ethnographic study with 12 Zalando customers from Germany, Sweden, and England, who ranged in age from 22 to 34 and represented a variety of demographics and attitudes. The results of this work informed their consumer survey, in which the authors interviewed 2,500 consumers in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, France, and Germany. After the interviews, the authors went shopping with the participants of the ethnographic study, observing their habits, decision-making processes, and the triggers.

9 The Genomatica survey was done online among 2,000 US teenagers and adults in the United States, representatively among generational age groups and gender splits. Data were collected between 31 March and 8 April 2021.

10 Fashion Revolution commissioned a survey of 5,000 people aged 16–75, in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom in 2020.

Overconsumption is declared to be one of the biggest issues of fashion industry: during the pandemic, there was a positive change reported regarding customers' attitude and a "not buying new" movement, second-hand purchasing, besides a booming interest in mending, which leads to the longer life of the products (Finnigan 2020). Lately, demand for sustainable fashion also opened new (business) opportunities: several companies have started to offer special products related to clothing care, laundry products, and repair services, and many brands have implemented a sort of "how to take care of your products to give them the longest life" in their communication (O'Connor 2021). There are many positive changes in consumer attitudes, and governmental institutions have also implemented mandatory regulations in terms of environmental and social sustainability in fashion. That can be seen in the headquarter countries and regions of the biggest fashion companies, Europe and the United States of America as well. Just to mention the latest developments: after the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and various state agencies and legislatures are pursuing or considering measures such as additional chemical use restrictions and prohibitions, new notification and reporting requirements on chemical use and imports, limitations on product disposal options, and extended producer responsibility obligations, in January 2022, the New York state legislature unveiled the Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act, which is a bill that attempts to make New York the first state in the United States to effectively "hold the biggest brands in fashion to account for their role in climate change" (Lombardi–Schumacher 2022). The Fashioning Accountability and Building Real Institutional Change (FABRIC) Act, introduced in May 2022, proposes major incentives to accelerate domestic apparel manufacturing and new workplace protections to cement the US as the global leader in responsible apparel production (Remake 2022). France has introduced a ban and fine of the destruction of unsold goods (reference), and a supply chain due diligence act was adopted by the German Federal Parliament and will enter into force on 1 January 2023 with the aim of improving the protection of international human rights and the environment by setting binding standards for large companies and their value chains (Federal Government of Germany 2021). At the end of March 2022, the European Commission introduced and adopted the comprehensive EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles that sets out how textile products on the EU market will be free of hazardous substances and produced in respect of social rights and the environment until 2030 (European Commission 2022). The strategy covers several fields from reducing waste, tackling micro-plastic pollution to combating greenwashing, the extension of producer responsibility and innovative business models, and it requires Member States to adapt and encourages favourable practices.

A Call for Reform? The Impact of COVID-19 on the Supply Chain

The World Trade Statistical Review 2021 shows patterns on how COVID-19 shaped the textile and garment export: COVID-19 significantly affected global textile and apparel trade volumes, resulting in the substantial growth of textile exports and a declined demand for apparel. Fashion companies' efforts to diversify apparel sourcing from China somehow waned during the pandemic. COVID-19 did not shift the competitive landscape of the world textile exports; meanwhile, textile exports from China and Vietnam gained new momentum during the pandemic (WTO 2021a). China was also the biggest textile exporter with increasing percentages in the world trade in textiles – in this way, another dominance has emerged, just not with leading firms and buyers but nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic was (is) an external shock, and on a larger scale it seriously affected international trade as well. When the pandemic broke out in China, the raw material flow was cut from the different countries' fashion producer companies as the pandemic spread in – and affected invariably – the different continents and countries. The fashion industry (including production, retail, and consumption as well) was facing several disruptions, as when the pandemic hit the Western (European) consumer markets, the stores were closed and fashion brands cancelled orders from mainly Southeast Asian and East-Central European companies or were stuck with unsold collections (Teodoro–Rodriguez 2020). Women make up the large majority of workers in the global supply chains, especially factories in the apparel supply chain. Brown (2021) emphasized that these workers formerly faced significant inequalities in wages, workplace hazards, gender-based violence, and harassment and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic compounded these conditions and exacerbated the long-standing structural inequities. "The pandemic is reversing hard-won development gains, adding to the problems facing the most vulnerable" – told Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, World Trade Organization Director-General (WTO 2021b). Furthermore, countries whose economies rely heavily on manual labour are particularly susceptible to further shocks, and workers face high job insecurity. Summarily, the pandemic caused deepening inequalities across country groups and a deeper global wealth gap (The State of Fashion 2022).

Disruption along the supply chain was seen owing to the pervasive, changing geographies of the GVC, the changing sourcing patterns, in addition to the interconnectedness and the dependency between the different actors. As The State of Fashion 2022 declared, only a few fashion companies could stay persistent or even surpass their pre-pandemic performance in some cases. The number of the "value destroyers" – companies who are generating negative economic profit – was higher than ever in 2021. Furthermore, the loss of the bottom 80% in

terms of value creation more than offsets the profit of the top 20% (The State of Fashion 2022). According to the report (published before the Russian–Ukrainian war), the market environment is supposed to remain complex with supply chain bottlenecks, manufacturing delays, high shipping costs, and material shortages, and companies are scaling up, nearshoring closer to the headquarter countries. The power asymmetries and unequal distribution of profit along the garment value chain has become apparent from the uneven distribution of losses as a result of the pandemic. While the buyers are price makers, manufacturers are price takers within the garment industry. The effects of demand reductions on leading firms were quickly transmitted to apparel manufacturers. Payment deferrals were followed by sanctions for shipment delays and cancellations of orders, many of them already completed or in progress (Castañeda-Navarrete et al. 2021). This process – when the market puts pressure on the retailer's profit – transmits this reduction to the manufacturers' side, who has to reduce its costs as well: this can happen by lowering the standards (it can be an easier, cost-effective assembly activity such as reducing the number of pockets or having fewer stitches) or by squeezing labour costs (increased homework, reduction in wages or price rates, and further subcontracting to lower-cost factories) (Appelbaum–Gereffi 1994).

Consequently, COVID-19 not only meant closed stores for fashion business but a humanitarian crisis at the end of the supply chain. As many brands have cancelled orders when the first pandemic hit with lockdowns, they were refused to pay for billions of goods that have been already manufactured and shipped (Anner et al. 2020). The result was devastating for the countries and millions of workers throughout the region of Southeast Asia. Factory owners have sacked thousands of workers in Bangladesh with the violation of their contracts, and the workers have suffered hunger with little governmental or international support (Islam 2020). The author also find similarities between the way fashion workers were treated during the pandemic and the Rana Plaza tragedy.[11] According to his findings, social audits of fashion companies have not improved workers' economic or human rights despite a retail revenue growth. The author considers social audits a more symbolic and ritual strategy that helps to maintain existing inequalities and believes that forced labour[12] exists in the supply chain of the fashion brands, even despite clearly defined codes of conduct (Islam 2022). After a year, fashion companies slashed prices to stay competitive, and orders for the

11 The tragedy of the Rana Plaza was a structural failure that happened on 24 April 2013 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It caused the death of more than 1,100 people and left approximately 2,500 injured.

12 According to Berrone (2016), "it is the law" is a sin of greenwashing. That is a practice proclaiming sustainability accomplishments or commitments that are already required by existing laws or regulations. From this point of view, any company code of conduct prohibiting forced labor can be seen as greenwashing, as United Nations and International Labor Organization has clear conventions against forced labor (if a country joined UN and/or ILO, it has to prohibit forced labour by law).

current season were down by 30% compared to last year; manufacturers even accepted orders below cost (Deeley 2021). This is in line with the experience of Hungarian production companies, who also reported that prices are lower with 10-20% or even 30% and clients pay later than the average payment deadline (Dobos-Nagy 2021). The unprecedented uncertain circumstances also push manufacturers in the direction to accept very low prices from the buyers, as they fear the repercussions of the ongoing economic situation in the long term and want to keep the clients.

Exposure to danger, the risk is an important factor in terms of power relations, and resilience is key regarding to the coronavirus pandemic as an external shock. There are several NGOs who are dedicated to sustainable fashion and labour rights issues.[13] The COVID-19 pandemic generated a wave of new "caring at a distance" initiatives, where consumer movements ask individuals to respond to globalized relationships of commodity production (Goodman 2004). One of the biggest achievements of garment labour rights organizations and sustainable fashion activists was the launch of the international #PayUp campaign: with the use of the hashtag in social media, they called out fashion brands to pay up lost wages. While mainstream media and activists celebrated the achievement that *This Hashtag Unlocked $15 Billion of Lost Wages Due to Cancelled Orders from Gap, Levi's, and Other Brands* (Bobb 2020), others turned the spotlight on the fact that these calls seemed futile in the face of fashion supply chains that have long been structured in ways that absolve brands of responsibility. The stories of worker exploitation and abuse in the garment industry that emerged during the pandemic were not discussed as effects of global capitalism but were rather recast as evidence of a world suddenly in "crisis" (Khan–Richards 2021). There were numerous civil unrests and protests due to jobs at risk and cancelled orders. Labour rights advocates warned that the "non-implementation of labour laws could lead to anarchy" (Hasan 2021).

Abdulla (2021) also emphasized that the pandemic reinforced the fragility of the global supply chains and the power imbalance between suppliers and buyers. According to the author, the "global apparel industry now works on building back better", which seems optimistic and not yet reasonably confirmed. During the pandemic, the challenges of suppliers were widely reported (Abdulla 2021) (namely cancelled orders, obstruction and delay of raw material supplement, local infection rates and lockdown instructions, etc.), but it is important to point out that this does not mean any direct consequences and changes. The author quotes several industry sourcing experts who told that the buyer–supplier relationship had become very transactional: the statement represents more the interest of the buyers, as it mentions the inefficiency and that it does not allow brands to build

13 Fashion Revolution published a list about the key organizations dealing with sustainable fashion: https://tinyurl.com/mpfx7rha (last access: 02.08.2022)

and maintain a relationship with the manufacturing supplier and also notes the lack of accountability and commitment (on the supplier side). The article also discusses that the pandemic-related disruption served as a wake-up call for suppliers who are asking for more money and security. However, I am deeply sceptical about achieving these (money and security), as the fashion industry is a notorious example for the "race to the bottom"[14] and is extremely competitive. This attitude also appears in the practice that suppliers intentionally (and/or out of necessity) accept orders below cost or make offers below their competitors' prices to gain orders. To compete with this mentality, a seemingly implausibly unified action, common agreements, and wide collaboration would be the only option that would eliminate (price) competition (and differences) between suppliers.

Consulting reports (for example: Berg et al. 2020) emphasize the idea of partnership, a more collaborative, more two-way approach than the current, more general supplier–buyer relationship, as close relationships are considered to be "a key for harnessing and scaling up the move to a new, and possibly better normal in the fashion industry" (Abdulla 2021). But building up closer relationships and putting an end to the dependent position must equally serve both parties' interest in order for it to become feasible. The article also mentions that one supplier can also work for twenty fashion brands and big retailers like C&A works together with over 1,000 suppliers, while it makes building closer relationships quite challenging.[15]

Profits and Risks Engraved into Contracts: The *Force Majeure* Debate

Cancelling fashion orders made a case for a legal rethink as well: the fashion industry mostly relied on a "force majeure" (superior force or vis major) clause to cancel orders amidst the pandemic. There is an ongoing debate across brands' liability in supplier contracts: the legality of the force majeure claims and the cancellation of orders without paying is at the centre of questions. The force majeure refers to unforeseeable events (like the COVID-19 pandemic), but the pandemic was not mentioned explicitly in the contract in every case. The clause perfectly illustrates the dynamic among profit and risks between the suppliers and the fashion brands. A number of retailers had language in their contracts so broad that they allowed cancellations for almost any reason: they could cancel

14 The race to the bottom refers to a competitive situation where a company, state, or nation attempts to undercut the competition's prices by sacrificing quality standards or worker safety or reducing labour costs. It is often done by defying regulation and lowering standards and legal barriers.

15 German apparel brand C&A regularly published its supplier list on its website: https://tinyurl.com/3vsm2j6p (last access: 08.08.2022)

without penalty or further obligations to the seller at any time for any or no reason, at any stage. But numerous experts claim that brands stiffed their suppliers and workers because they could, not because any legal doctrine said it was right. A group of labour and human rights experts argues that cancelling orders violates international human rights norms, particularly due diligence obligations under responsible business practices (Cline 2021).

Some fashion brands have finally paid up their suppliers thanks to the (social) media pressure initiated by labour rights NGOs, but others stood by their decisions, often citing "force majeure" clauses in contracts that claimed the pandemic to be so beyond their control that they were excused from paying. But I would like to emphasize that even if there is a "case" for payout, few suppliers and manufacturers have challenged brands who have cancelled orders for fear of reprisals or have received fewer orders, as no one wants to jeopardize the fragile supplier–client relationships. Manufacturers do not have a bargaining power in a lawsuit – and even resource for a legal battle.

We can consider the contracts within the fashion industry between buyers and manufacturers that are mostly a "formality". In terms of working conditions or living wage, most of the fashion brands nowadays have a code of conduct (that relies on the principles of the International Labour Organization), but if manufacturers must reduce costs and outsource the production to sub-subcontractors, these codes of conduct are not reliable for later companies, and there will not be any formal relationship between the brand and who actually makes their products. In this way, buyers can run away from direct responsibility and transfer the risk to other parties. This is in line with the phenomenon that even fashion brands "granting living wage" initiatives are outsourced to third parties (Edwards et al. 2019).

Instead of Conclusions: What Is Now and What Comes Next?

The COVID-19 pandemic has not just caused serious disruptions but also turned the spotlight on the need for shorter supply chains and the transformation of existing sourcing practices in the fashion industry. Apparel companies are working on "changing their sourcing-country mix, turning their attention to reshoring, and particularly nearshoring, to secure the supply chain" (Hedrich et al. 2021). With relocation – as the action of moving production to a new place –, fashion tries to move away from Asia, which is a reasonable and challenging step at the same time: the need for shorter supply chains is in contrast with the growing reliance on China in terms of textiles. The key trends – namely sustainability and relocation – that were already transforming the garment GVCs

are expected to accelerate as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the consolidation and reconfiguration of supply chains and the emergence of new drivers of competitiveness (Castañeda-Navarrete et al. 2021). Competitiveness in the garment industry is not primarily determined by low wages anymore. The fashion industry has reached a crossroads where speed beats costs regarding marginal advantages. Furthermore, the concern of sustainability is getting stronger, and business policy and operation of fashion brands cannot stay untouched. Relocation can be motivated by a desire to reduce environmental and social concerns. As Pourhejazy and Ashby claim (2021), the financial criterion had the highest impact on former considerations of apparel brands regarding sourcing and supply chain complexity, and non-financial aspects were predominantly neglected; however, environmental sustainability appears to have a high influence: stakeholders are increasingly willing to accept lower profit margins, emphasizing trust and share in firms' sustainability vision. Former advantages of delocation are also derogated by geopolitical tension, trade agreements and wars, and the insecurity caused by fluctuation among exchange rates besides instabilities in the international business environment.

"New manufacturing hubs" – namely Turkey, Eastern Europe,[16] and America – were likely to arise before the pandemic: a McKinsey report (2018) examined factors behind the relocation of production. It declares that while every sourcing hub comes with own environmental and social compliance risk, industry watchdogs have their eyes on Asia, where labour costs are also increasing in a higher rate than in other regions. The German fashion house Hugo Boss stated in December 2021 that it was expanding production capacity closer to its base in Europe in order to reduce its dependence on South-East Asia: the company was enpanding its factory in Turkey and had plans to hire 1,000 people (Storbeck 2021). According to UkraineInvest (n. d.), through a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the European Union, combined with availability of skilled workforce and competitive production costs, Ukraine can become a major platform for the production of fabric, garment, and footwear, focused on both domestic and export markets. The textile industry already occupies one of the leading positions in Ukraine's manufacturing scene: a number of global fashion brands, such as Hugo Boss, Marks & Spencer, and Tommy Hilfiger, already have production facilities in the country. While at the time of writing this paper there is a war in Ukraine, my assumption is that Eastern EU Member States with their existing manufacturing capacities are overvalued (in addition to the benefits of EU membership such as the common market) because of the sanctions towards Russia and the

16 The report did not specify which countries are treated as part of Eastern Europe, countries that are lying east from the Carpathians (e.g. Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, or Georgia) or the Eastern EU Member States (including Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Poland) as well.

unprecedented situation and uncertainty in Ukraine. According to a director of a Hungarian garment manufacturing company: "Hungary is at the centre of Europe and had already proven itself." Another CEO of one of the biggest Hungarian manufacturing companies has shared that according to their experiences, European fashion brands were trying to concentrate their production within the European Union's borders because of supply chain security, quick access, and flexible, close production. A further CEO agreed and emphasized that several fashion brands had become disappointed in Asian production and had been looking for an even more expensive, European solution (Dobos 2020). Relocation of fashion production towards the CEE region can also lead to an increasing sustainability of the fashion system, as the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles set ambitious targets for the industry in many levels.

There is also an ever-growing visibility of exploitation and unethical practices and an urging pressure from NGOs and a certain part of the public that finally hurts the image of the fashion brands, but it is not likely to be a key driver in terms of reducing inequalities within its supply chain. Maxine Bédat, founder of fashion think-tank New Standard Institute, claims that any progress towards a more environmentally-friendly or more ethical sourcing practice regarding reducing the "harm" (in terms of environmental pollution and human rights) of the fashion industry can only be forced by legislation – not by initiatives from companies or the customers (Bédat 2021). Even if the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and attracted the public attention to the inequalities across the fashion value chain, resulting several media reports and campaigns towards paying up, it was the same during the time of the tragedy of the Rana Plaza.[17] Overall, no systematic change has taken place since the tragedy.

Even if there is consensus about being no future without achieving it, sustainability – in its full meaning and all aspects – cannot be reached by reduced waste, organic and recycled materials, and carbon-neutral shipping while exploitation and bargaining power seem to remain unchanged. The current uncertainty – and hesitancy – also makes commitments more challenging. The economic crisis can decimate fashion brands or reduce their revenue, which will definitely have a huge effect on the suppliers. Even if the geography of production can change and relocation can become more common in the future, I claim that power relations will be characterized by strong dependency in the global garment value chain.

17 On 24 April 2013, the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh crashed down, killing 1,134 people and leaving thousands more injured. The collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh was the worst ever industrial incident to hit the garment industry, and it also gained the attention of the world press that widely covered the incident. The tragedy was followed by a struggle for justice for the Rana Plaza workers and safe factories for all.

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 28–52

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0002

Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion in Romania

Laura NISTOR
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
nistorlaura@uni.sapientia.ro

Gyöngyvér BÁLINT
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
balintgyongyver@uni.sapientia.ro

Abstract. The present study is an attempt at mapping the Romanian society's attitudes towards sustainable fashion. Our analyses are based on the European Commission Eurobarometer 92.4 (2019) data relevant for Romania. We have looked into ten Likert-type variables focused on consumer attitudes regarding sustainable fashion. As a first step, we created a sustainable-fashion attitude scale, followed by an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) aimed at investigating the inner structure of the variables. Thereafter, we employed a linear regression analysis in a bid to answer the question as to which are the variables that account for commitment to sustainable fashion in Romania. Inter alia, our results suggest that positive attitudes towards sustainable fashion are most enhanced by awareness about environmental issues and sensitivity to environmental protection in general and are weakened most significantly by poor financial situation measured in terms of difficulty in paying the bills. Besides gathering information on environmental protection from traditional media (the press), relying on Internet sources in this respect also increases support for the transition to a more environmentally conscious textile industry. Our analysis touches upon research limitations such as the attitude–action gap.

Keywords: sustainable fashion, ethical fashion, attitudes, factor analysis, Romania, regression

Introduction

Sustainable fashion can be understood as a new fashion paradigm that is in search of new solutions in response to the problems of the fashion industry. First of all, it was fast fashion that represented the problems along which the unsustainability

of fashion could be thematized. The meaning of fast fashion is associated with cheap clothes, technologies hazardous to the environment, underpaid labour force, fast production, and disposable, worthless items of clothing (Fletcher 2008). On the other hand, sustainable fashion endeavours to redefine fashion starting from the procurement of raw materials through design, production, and transport all the way to consumption. The business model of sustainable fashion is based on long lifecycle, which also has the effect of slowing down consumption: therefore, it needs to create high-quality, aesthetic, and durable products. Consequently, sustainable fashion may be perceived as a cultural shift (Gurova–Morozova 2016) that can be determined not only as a cultural practice going against profiteering but as a paradigm shift that assumes a new kind of creativity and a business logic entirely different from the fast fashion industry (Fletcher–Grose 2012).

The terms ethical and sustainable fashion are often encountered interchangeably. Both concepts enjoy great visibility: at the time of this writing, there are 14.8 million hits for #sustainablefashion and 5.8 million hits for #ethicalfashion on Instagram. According to Lyst's 2020 Conscious Fashion Report,[1] there has been a 37% increase in searches for sustainability-related keywords in the fashion world.

There has also been observed an increased market presence of products labelled sustainable and/or ethical (e.g. Liu et al. 2020). As indicated by Cervellon and Carey (2011), within the fashion industry, sustainable products have left the niche sector and now represent a separate branch. This statement is confirmed by Business Research Company's[2] data for the year 2020: the global ethical fashion market size reached a value of nearly $6.35 billion in 2019, and the market is expected to grow from $6.35 billion in 2019 to $8.25 billion in 2023. Having said that, there are certain insights that suggest ethical clothing sales is still carving out only a small segment of the total clothing sales (Magnuson et al. 2017) and that the road to sustainable fashion is paved with question marks. Pinnock (2022) also claims that: "if the industry continues with its existing decarbonization initiatives, emissions will be capped at 2.1 billion tons a year by 2030. That's the same level the report estimates the industry emitted in 2018, accounting for four per cent of the world's total emissions."

Hence, fashion's high-sounding sustainability efforts are also surrounded by an air of distrust. One of the reasons behind this is that we are dealing with a sector that is leaving behind serious environmental damage, and the social deficiencies (unhealthy, unethical working conditions) that arise in the course of production are equally well known. With fashion products, doubts are often raised as to whether we are dealing with de facto sustainable practices or greenwashing (Cervellon–Carey 2011, Liu et al. 2020). Under the cover of greenwashing, certain

1 https://tinyurl.com/56m2p57u (last access: 04.11.2022)
2 https://tinyurl.com/4aexdsrx (last access: 04.11.2022)

products are presented as sustainable, whereas in reality their production and marketing do not meet the relevant requirements of environmental protection and social responsibility (Niinimäki 2015).

Over and above, this sector is tasked with balancing seemingly incompatible elements such as novelty, renewal, and luxury on the one hand and durability, longevity, and sustainability on the other (Grazzini et al. 2021). Consumers have a tough choice to make: fast fashion offers the possibility of joining new trends at a relatively low price and at a breakneck pace, while sustainable fashion is rather formulated as an imperative, with environmentally conscious lifestyle gaining popularity. Crane (2016) describes the consumer of ethical fashion as someone who is actively engaged in reviewing the environmental as well as social characteristics of the products. Ethical consumers are thus conscious consumers who make cognitive efforts when judging a product and who take decisions after due deliberation, during which they confront their values, ideals, and ideology with such concrete issues as the higher price, lower availability, and occasionally less fashionability of ethical products (Niinimäki 2010).

In our research, we have committed ourselves to identify the attitudes present among Romanian citizens towards sustainable fashion. The analysis at hand made use of the database linked to the European Commission Special Eurobarometer 92.4/2019 research (European Commission 2020),[3] which adopted ten Likert-type statements in investigating how important the various ethical and sustainability criteria were for respondents with respect to items of clothing. Albeit several research studies looked into the consumption of ethical and/or sustainable fashion products, the vast majority of them were qualitative research (Jacobs et al. 2018) and with a focus on Western countries, meaning that the available data on the East-Central European population's relevant attitude and behaviour is relatively scarce (Koszewska 2013). As to our knowledge, this subject has not been dealt with comprehensively in Romania either, and but a few small-scale research projects have been conducted so far (e.g. Dabija et al. 2018, Nistor–Bálint 2021). Hence, our quantitative analysis is an attempt at bridging these gaps in the literature.

A literature review is presented below, where we cover the definitions of ethical and sustainable fashion, ethical consumption gap, and the importance of examining the various attitudes. The subsequent section discusses the methodology, questions, and hypotheses of the research. Part three of the paper contains the analyses and their discussion, and the paper ends with conclusions.

3 https://tinyurl.com/3cederd3 (last access: 04.11.2022)

Literature Review

Definitions of Ethical/Sustainable Fashion

In spite of an existing state of conceptual disarray (Csanák 2018), recent research considers that the sustainable fashion consumption concept, practice, and research have reached their maturity and expansion (Dabas–Whang 2021). The evolution of the very concept of sustainability is, however, intricate, less clear, and it can be interpreted narrowly (e.g. avoiding environmental pollution, prudent use of resources) as well as broadly, holistically (e.g. environmental, social, and economic sustainability) (Niinimäki 2015). Sustainable fashion in the broader sense often acts as a synonym for ethical fashion (e.g. Haug–Busch 2015), as in both cases a key consideration is how fairly the environment and the employees are treated by the fashion industry. Undoubtedly, there can observed certain shifts of emphasis concerning one or the other component of the concepts, but essentially sustainable as well as ethical fashion can be defined as fashion with conscience (Jorgens 2006). Both can be characterized by fairness in their approaching production, design, marketing, and consumption. Likewise, the present analysis considers the two concepts as synonyms, however, showing a preference for the term sustainable fashion. That is so because our observations have indicated that the concept of sustainable fashion is more popular than ethical fashion in the Romanian public discourse, the term *sustenabilitate* having become established as a neologism in the Romanian language.

On the practical side, several items can be listed under the designation ethical/sustainable fashion such as organic, green, sustainable, eco-, slow, etc. fashion (Niinimäki 2010). The main focus of eco-fashion is on environmental protection – products made of bio- or organic materials fall into this category. Slow fashion refers to local-scale fashion, which utilizes local labour force, traditional handicraft techniques, and local resources (Fletcher 2008, Blazquez et al. 2020). Each of these denominations aims to "highlight or correct a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry, including animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation" (Lundblad–Davies 2016: 149).

Reimers et al. (2016) use the term ethical fashion, but their case is no exception as the adopted terminology is again a multidimensional construction pointing in the direction of environmental and social sustainability. As a rule, empirical research studies concentrate on one characteristic dimension of the concept – environmental protection, working conditions, etc. –, whereas all these dimensions coexist within the meaning of ethical fashion, as claimed by the authors who hypothesise four dimensions of ethical fashion as follows: 1) animal welfare, 2) employee welfare, 3) environmental responsibility, and 4) slow fashion. Research conducted in Australia demonstrated that these four

dimensions jointly determine the concept of ethical fashion. Evidently, the four dimensions do not make an equal contribution to the concept, as the research in question revealed, for instance, that animal welfare was the most prominent dimension among Australian consumers (Reimers et al. 2016). In a subsequent research, they found that the slow fashion dimension – i.e. the durability and longevity of the product, local resources, and fair trade – were the major determining dimensions of ethical fashion (Magnuson et al. 2017). Both research results indicate that consumers attach importance to certain dimensions of ethical fashion that are often disregarded by manufacturers or the marketing process in the narratives on ethical fashion, which may ultimately be another reason for the attitude–action inconsistencies emerging around fashion products (Magnuson et al. 2017). Koszewska (2013) found that Polish consumers tend to adopt a more restrictive definition of sustainable fashion: they take an ecological approach to sustainable fashion, wherein socio-ethical aspects and social sensitivity are less significant imperatives in selecting fashion products. Such discrepancies show that there are cross-cultural differences related to the understanding and approach of sustainable fashion and its consumption (Dabas–Whang 2021).

Overall, it can be said that the holistic approach on sustainable fashion that also stresses environmental and social responsibility can be defined as a synonym for ethical fashion. Both of them are critical concepts since they call into question the modus operandi of the fashion industry as well as the mainstream consumer practices (Gurova–Morozova 2016). At the same time, both concepts can be seen as umbrella terms that can accommodate different interpretations and specific practices (idem).

The Importance of Studying Attitudes in spite of the Ethical Consumption Gap

One of the most relevant issues in this topic is the ethical consumption gap, meaning that positive attitudes towards ethical consumption oftentimes do not materialize in concrete actions, that is, consumers do not always "wear their talk" (Carrington et al. 2010). There can be several reasons underlying the attitude–action inconsistency, one of which is social desirability. The idea of ethical fashion is gradually gaining popularity – consumers are frequently faced with messages that involve morally charged actions, thus feeling urged to respond accordingly (Carrington et al., 2010).

Other authors (e.g. Harris et al. 2016, Wiederhold–Martinez 2018) go further than social desirability and group the inhibitory factors emerging in connection with ethical consumption gap into external and internal factors. External factors include higher product prices, less readily available products, and certain structural features such as the consumer's domicile, as the wider socio-economic

environment can determine the importance of the topic. On the other hand, we can find among internal factors consumers' motivations, values, and attitudes, information on and awareness about sustainability and ethical consumption, or the lack of these, and consumers' scepticism about whether their opting for ethical products can make a real difference for sustainable fashion (see also Dabas–Whang 2021).

Other authors (e.g. Joergens 2006) emphasize the importance of awareness, knowledge, and information. Consumers are fairly sceptical and distrustful of sustainable fashion products (Cervellon–Carey 2011). Therefore, one possibility for bridging the attitude–action gap is manufacturers' transparent communication. Consumers are in need of relevant information, showing increased eagerness to know the answers for the *made by* instead of or besides the *made in* part, i.e.: who manufactured the product, under what kind of working conditions, and what raw materials/ingredients were used in the process[4] (Niinimäki 2015), so labels rich in information have a key role in this respect (Crane 2016, Wiederhold–Martinez 2018). More than that, manufacturers need to communicate their endeavours and achievements towards sustainability via advertisements, taking up different positions, and having an active media presence (Grazzini et al. 2021). Generally speaking, ethical products require more innovative technologies and raw materials with a hefty price tag, while certification is yet another factor driving up the price range. Therefore, specific information on the effective benefits of paying the price premium must also be made available to consumers (Liu et al. 2020).

As already noted, interlinking fashion and sustainability is problematic also because long-term, ethical planning emphasizes the joint responsibility of producers and consumers. Then again, fashion narratives steer us towards expressing uniqueness and the pursuit of ever-new experiences. The primary purpose of consuming fashion products is creating an own style and having a fresh appearance in line with the current trends; in other words: short-term thinking and planning (Haug–Busch 2015). In this paradoxical situation, purchasing clothing articles is not an altruistic action (Vehmas et al. 2018). Drawing on earlier studies, Hiller Connel and Kozar (2014) ascertained that approx. 41% of the consumers are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable clothes, extra payment being capped at 25%. Other researchers (e.g. Carrigan–Attala 2001, Joergens 2006, Magnuson et al. 2017) have been even more careful in their conclusions, claiming that consumers are inclined to purchase ethical products if that does not entail any extra payment on their part. Findings have also confirmed that the lower the

4 It was in response to these consumer needs that applications, such as *Good on You* (https://goodonyou.eco/), documenting and tracking the sustainability of products and brands, or QR-code-based tracking options were created (such is the case of the brand *Unrobe*, which allows for QR code scanning with a view to tracking the life-cycle of the product from the raw materials through the production phase and all the way to its shipping).

price tag on ethical fashion products, the more positive attitude consumers take to them (Magnuson et al. 2017).

However, it must be emphasized that ethical consumption often means frugal consumption, i.e. buying less and spending less on clothing products – thus skipping the high price tag of fashionable products – is not always an indicator for the reluctance to buy ethically. Consumers can choose among various alternative actions. For instance, the popularity of second-hand shops can be quoted here: one of the motivations for buying used products is a combination between austerity/frugality and environmentalism (e.g. Guiot–Roux 2010). Likewise, a previous research we have conducted in Romania revealed that consumers view second-hand shopping as a cost-effective way towards sustainability (Nistor–Bálint 2021). Niinimäki (2010) has come to the view that ethical consumption is realized when consumers are not facing external constraints, namely: no extra payment needs to be made, the selected product is no less trendy than its conventional variants, and product availability eliminates any extra effort on the customer side. The phenomenon of sharing economy, respectively the case of collaborative consumption by clothes sharing is another, increasingly popular alternative for practising sustainable/ethical fashion consumption: besides reducing the amount of clothes production, this practice may result in a favourable cost–benefit ratio for the consumers, both in terms of financial investments and self-gratification (e.g. Arrigo 2021).

Despite the ethical consumption gap, sizing up the attitudes is a major undertaking. Numerous research studies have pointed to a positive relationship between ethical-fashion-related attitudes and actions (Niinimäki 2010, Liu et al. 2020). While it is true that attitudes are not always consistent with actions, sustainable actions can be most explained by positive attitudes towards and information gathered on sustainability (Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014). Furthermore, a vast number of research papers have arrived at the conclusion that besides aspects such as norms, trust, and knowledge, attitudes towards sustainable fashion are essential components and predictors of the consumption of ethical fashion products (Liu et al. 2020).

An examination of attitudes is all-important also because the issue of ethical fashion – despite the increasingly apparent media presence of this topic – is not among every consumer's priorities (Crane 2016). However, identifying the variables that outline attitudes towards ethical fashion will enable us to determine the social segment that holds the future promise of acting in keeping with their attitudes provided that all other barriers have been done away with. Exploring the attitudes helps us pinpoint those dimensions associated with ethical fashion that truly matter to consumers, to which they exhibit a heightened sensitivity, this way becoming possible to amplify this dimension of ethical consumption during the phases of production and marketing (Wiederhold–Martinez 2018).

Methodology and Research Questions

This research has undertaken to look into the attitudes towards sustainable fashion in Romania. The analyses performed herein were based on the research carried out within the framework of European Commission Special Eurobarometer 92.4 (2019), entitled *Attitudes of European Citizens towards the Environment, Corruption, and Attitudes towards the Impact of Digitalisation on Daily Lives*, more specifically based on its database on Romania.[5] The Romanian data survey took place in December 2019 and made use of the computer-assisted face-to-face interview method. The adopted procedure was stratified probability sampling applied among the population of 15-year-olds and older. The Romanian sample size was 1,081.

Among the three topics addressed in the research, we have analysed two sets of questions on sustainable fashion production, pertaining to the QA *Attitudes of European Citizens towards the Environment* section[6] (*Table 1*).

Table 1. *The original wording of the ten items measuring attitudes towards sustainable fashion*[7]

Var. no.	Variable name	Value labels			
		1	2	3	4
QA13_1	Clothing should be made to last longer.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_2	Clothing should only be made from materials that can be recycled.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_3	Second-hand clothing should be promoted more (e.g. through tax cuts).	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_4	Brands should be required to ensure good working conditions inside and outside the EU.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_5	Clothes labelling should provide information on their environmental impact and the working conditions under which they were made.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_6	Clothes should be available at the lowest possible price, regardless of the environment or the working conditions under which they were made.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA14_1	There is not enough information available about environmental problems and working conditions linked to clothing.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree

5 European Commission, Brussels (2020). Eurobarometer 92.4 (2019). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. *ZA7602 Data file Version 1.0.0*. https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13652.

6 Which is partly based on questions asked in the context of Eurobarometer 88.1 (ZA6925) and 87.1 (ZA6861).

7 For ease of interpretation, the codes assigned in the original questionnaire (1 – totally agree, 4 – totally disagree) were reversed, as seen in the table, so that increase in values can mark an increase in agreement.

Var. no.	Variable name	Value labels			
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**
QA14_2	Many products claim to be environmentally friendly, but you do not trust this is true.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA14_3	There should be stricter rules when calculating environmental impact and related environmental claims.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA14_4	You are not interested in how environmentally friendly your clothes are.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree

Source: authors' edition

The ten statements reveal a focus on the various aspects of sustainable fashion from environmental protection and working conditions through product durability to transparency, expenditure, and availability. Two of the variables (QA13_6 and QA14_4) express points against and all the rest in support of the environmentally conscious manufacturing of wearing apparel. It has been argued in previous chapters that there are wide-ranging interpretations of ethical fashion in the literature, and empirical research has confirmed that consumers themselves tend to associate sustainable fashion with a whole range of different things. As postulated by Cervellon and Wernfelt (2012) and Koszewska (2013), consumers include here predominantly products made from organic and biomaterials, thereby defining ethical fashion more narrowly, in line with environmental sustainability. Other research has found that consumers keep in view working conditions as well – hence, issues of environmental and social sustainability are equally important to them (Reimers et al. 2016). In consideration of the foregoing, our first research question aimed to reveal the sustainability imperatives deemed important by consumers. On the other hand, we were also curious to find out to what extent the ten variables are independent of one another along the various dimensions of ethical/sustainable fashion. Given that no prior research into this subject had ever been conducted in Romania, an exploratory factor analysis was employed to study the internal structure of the variables. Finally, a regression analysis will be performed to answer the question as to which are the variables accounting for commitment to ethical fashion. For that purpose, several hypotheses were formulated.

To explain the behaviour of dependent variables, we applied variables linked with general environmental awareness (E1–E9) and sociodemographic features (S1–S11) found in the database and discussed in the literature. These are summarized in *Table 2* below.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of the explanatory variables*

	Variables	Aggregated categories	Percentage (%)
Environmental protection (E)	Environmental protection – personal importance (E1, E2)	Very important	46.2
		Not very important	53.8
	No. of environmental protection actions in the last 6 months – summarized the 14 possible mentions (E3, E4)	Up to 3 actions	69.4
		4 actions or more	30.6
	Environmental problem tackling: change the way we produce & trade (E5)	Not mentioned	77.7
		Changing the way we produce and trade	22.3
	Environmental problem tackling: change the way we consume (E6)	Not mentioned	78.7
		Changing the way we consume	21.3
	Environmental information sources: total newspapers (E7)	Not mentioned	87.2
		Total "Newspapers"	12.8
	Environmental information sources: total social networks / the Internet (E8)	Not mentioned	71.8
		Total "Social networks and the Internet"	28.2
	Concern about environmental problems (E9, factor variable)[8]		
Sociodemographic characteristics (S)	Type of community (S1)	Rural area	39.9
		Urban	60.1
	Gender (S2)	Women	54.8
		Men	45.2
	Age (S3)	15–24 years	11.9
		25–39 years	25.2
		40–54 years	31
		55 years and older	31.9
	Age – education (age of completion of full-time education) (S4, S5)	Up to 22 years	83.2
		22 years or older	16.8
	Household composition/size (no. of persons) (S6)	One	12.2
		Two	37.1
		Three	23.2
		Four or more	27.5
	Children in the household (S7)	Without children	59.7
		With children	40.3
	Employment status (S8)	Not working	40.8
		Employed	59.2

8 Extent of agreement with 6 different negative environmental impacts (QA7 Question: 1 – totally disagree, 4 – totally agree), resulted in a one-factor solution: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, KMO = 0.891, Approx. Chi-Square = 2,787.177, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: p = 0.000, communalities ≥ 0.250, Total Variance Explained = 61.303, Factor Loadings ≥ 0.500, Cronbach's alpha = 0.860.

Variables	Aggregated categories	Percentage (%)
Difficulties paying the bills in the last year (S9)	Almost never/never	46.2
	Had difficulties paying the bills	53.8
Social class – self-assessment (S10)	Working class	20.7
	Lower middle class	16
	Middle class	56
	Upper middle class	6.5
	Higher class	0.8
Internet use (S11)	Not almost every day	35.1
	Every day/almost every day	64.9

Source: authors' computation

Variables explaining sustainable fashion consumption were mostly investigated in the case of concrete actions. Literature explains these actions with the possession of relevant information, attitudes, habits, and contextual variables such as product availability (Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014). Information both on the environment in general and on sustainable fashion consumption in particular is an essential factor (Thøgersen 2000). Research have shown that the Internet and social media channels are the most used sources for reaching a wider public and thus enable producers and brands to communicate their sustainable initiatives (Vehmas et al. 2018). Since there is no specific variable available to us for assessing information and knowledge on sustainable fashion, we had to adopt proxy variables related to the sources of acquiring information on the environment. We have checked the roles of traditional media (newspapers) and new media (the Internet) under a common hypothesis that accounts for omni-channel media consumption:

H1: Respondents who are more intensive users of omni-channel media will hold more intense attitudes towards sustainable fashion than their peers getting information from traditional media.

Research has demonstrated that knowledge about environmentally friendly apparel is an important predictor of purchasing environmentally friendly apparel (Harris et al. 2016). In line with Koszewska's (2013) research conducted in Poland and based on cluster analysis, higher educational attainment significantly determines commitment to ethical consumption. In the light of this, our second hypothesis predicts that:

H2: Respondents with a high educational attainment will have a more positive attitude towards sustainable fashion.

A look at the impact of environmental concern yields dissimilar results in the literature. Cervellon and Carey (2011) found environmental concern to be the number one explanatory variable of sustainable fashion consumption among

customers from Canada and France. Cowan and Kinley (2014) arrived at similar results among US consumers. Likewise, other authors concluded that consumers who are more concerned about the environment are usually more engaged in pro-environmental consumer behaviours (Gam 2011, Koszewska 2013, Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014, Razzaq et al. 2018).

All the same, we can read about cases featuring environmentally concerned respondents showing preponderantly neutral or less intense attitudes towards sustainable fashion (Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014, Razzaq et al. 2018). This appears to be rooted in the specificity of attitudes, that is: positive environmental attitudes in general do not necessarily account for the more specific environmental attitudes (Razzaq et al. 2018). The complex nature of fashion products is a possible explanation for why environmental concern does not translate into intense attitudes and actions: even consumers giving evidence of intense environmental awareness may attach greater importance to the style, price range, and trendiness of a particular clothing item than to the sustainability of a given fashion product (e.g. McNeill–Moore 2015).

Several explanatory variables were adopted in analysing the impact of environmental concern. Moving from more abstract viewpoints to concrete actions, three variables were employed to assess environmental concern as follows: the importance of environmental protection (E1, E2), concern about various environmental issues (E9), and performing actions aimed at environmental protection (E3, E4). Over and above that, we have also investigated the impact of a more specific aspect to our topic, production- and consumption-related environmental concern, using variables E5 and E6 to this end.

Thus, our second hypothesis is divided into two sub-hypotheses as follows:

H3a: Attitudes towards sustainable fashion are more intense in the case of respondents showing more intense ***general*** *environmental concern.*

H3b: Attitudes towards sustainable fashion are more intense in the case of respondents showing more intense ***specific*** *environmental concern.*

Learning about the sample population's economic and social status allows us to find out to what extent commitment to sustainable fashion can be thematized as a predictor of status. Indeed, the higher price range of sustainable fashion products, the popularity and trendiness of the topic can be linked with the phenomenon of eco-chic, eco-narcissism (Griskevicius et al. 2010, Cervellon–Carey 2011). This can also be understood as the spectacle of sustainable fashion (Franklin 2011) in cases when we are building our wardrobe using a selection of clothing items labelled as sustainable, and doing so even without environmental awareness being at the core of our value system. Koszewska's study (2013) evinced that besides a high educational attainment, certain other factors significantly determine the ethical consumption segment in Poland, such as higher income status, high or medium occupational status, and living in a metropolitan area. Social status was

operationalized in multiple ways: subjectively estimated income situation (S9), subjective social status (S10); and then it was expected that:

H4: Consumers with a higher social status would be more committed to sustainable fashion.

The testing of hypotheses was done with the help of linear regression analysis.

Ethical fashion is not equally important to all consumers, as a whole series of characteristic consumer segments can be outlined from ethical hardliners to dismissive attitudes (Niinimäki 2010). In order to explore this issue, we have examined the internal structure of the variables from *Table 1*, and then we checked the hypotheses again. Studying ethical fashion consumption in Poland, Koszewska (2013) found six consumer clusters, of which two segments, the ecological conservatives and the ecologically and socially sensitive, showed commitment to sustainable/ethical fashion. The first group attached no importance to the responsible treatment of workers in the context of fashion products, showing instead sensitivity to ecological sustainability. The holistic, i.e. both ecological and social, imperative could be perceived in the latter group (cc. 16% of the consumers), where it constituted an essential touchstone of product selection. It is also our expectation that a consumer group can be outlined along our hypotheses, where the members of this category will be committed to sustainable fashion, as a result of which we can expect from these consumers in the future to perform actions that will in effect achieve sustainable fashion consumption.

Analysis and Discussions

Descriptive Statistics

In our analysis, we were first of all interested in identifying those clothing-related attitudes that respondents are more intensely committed to. Therefore, we began by studying the level of agreement with the ten statements presented in *Table 1*. *Graph 1* shows the scale means (scales 1–4) for Romania (N = 1,023–1,049) and, as the context for the interpretation of results, for the EU-28 (N = 25,647–26,799). Data suggest that the Romanian population aged 15 and over holds a relatively positive attitude towards this topic, as mean values indicate that responses clearly come under the dimension of agreement in the case of all eight statements in support of sustainable fashion. That being said, the comparison also brings to light that these values are lower for the EU-28 average score in the case of all supportive statements. The more striking discrepancy can be observed along the two variables pointing in the opposite direction: the Romanian population of the 15-year-olds and older is far more supportive of manufacturing cheap clothes

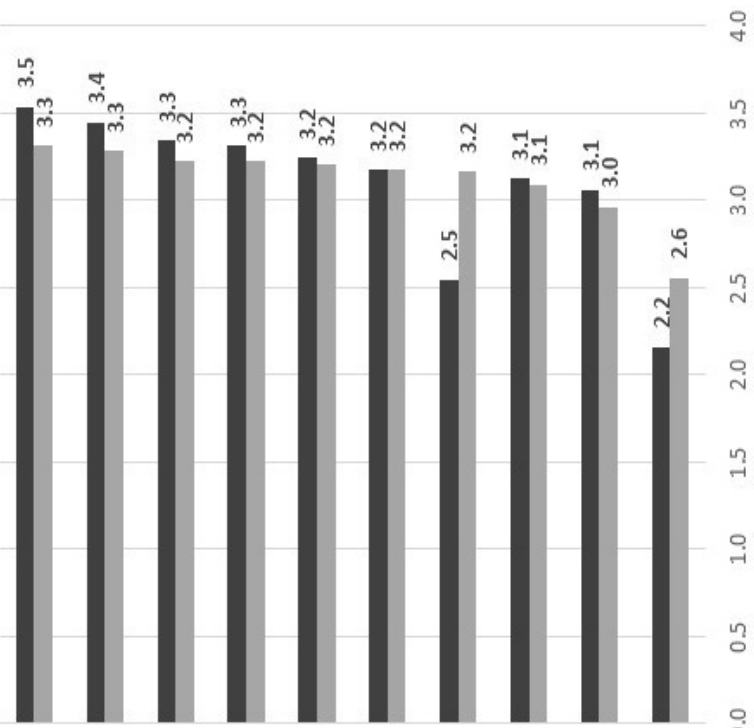
regardless of their environmental impact and the working conditions and shows somewhat greater disinterest in environmentally conscious clothing than in the case of the EU-28. Hence, there is but one difference between the two rankings that can be set up based on the mean values: supporting the manufacturing of cheap clothes regardless of their environmental impact was ranked seven in the Romanian and nine in the EU-28 context.

At first glance, it seems that, in general, components determining sustainable fashion, such as good working conditions, product durability, and more stringent regulations, are equally important for consumers. We may also conclude that respondents are sceptical and need more detailed information (Cervellon–Carey 2011). Considering both Romania and the EU-28, the highest level of agreement is with the statement claiming that clothing brands should make good working conditions an absolute necessity. In line with expectations, the least agreement is with the statement going against the principles of environmental consciousness, according to which respondents are not interested in how environmentally friendly their clothes are. These primary results are consistent with the view expressed in the literature that sustainable fashion is a popular concept, and so the answers provided are probably influenced by social desirability as well (Carrington et al. 2010).

Predictors of the Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion

Provided that the condition of internal consistency is met (Cronbach's alpha = 0.840), an environmental consciousness scale on clothing items was created for the joint analysis of Romanian attitudes towards sustainable fashion. The scale was created with the help of dummy variables. Codes 1 (totally disagree) and 2 (tend to disagree) were assigned a value of 0 – not concerned about sustainable fashion –, while codes 3 (tend to agree) and 4 (totally agree) a value of 1 – concerned about sustainable fashion. On the other hand, the two variables pointing against environmental consciousness (QA13_6 and QA14_4) were coded inversely. Values added this way allowed us to create a scale for sustainable fashion, where the value of 0 stood for an attitude totally not concerned about sustainable fashion and 10 for one totally concerned about sustainable fashion (N = 943, mean = 7.05, std. dev. = 1.982). Most of the participants scored 8 (35%) and 9 (22.2%) on the combined scales, seven obtained 10 points and two 0 points.

In the second step, the scale thus created was examined using the variables described in the subchapter on methodology (*Table 2*), performing linear regression analysis. The explanatory power of our model was 31.6%. Supporting sustainable fashion shows the strongest correlation with the factor variable "awareness about environmental issues", followed by the level of importance individuals attach to environmental protection. Therefore, hypothesis *H3a* is clearly confirmed, as we



Source: authors' computation

Graph 1. *Attitudes towards different attributes of sustainable fashion in Romania and the EU-28 (mean scores based on 1–4 Likert scales)*

have found that: *Attitudes towards sustainable fashion are more intense in the case of respondents showing more intense general environmental concern.* In view of this, it can be said that our results are consistent with literature findings that environmentally conscious respondents show the most commitment to sustainable fashion (e.g. Cervellon–Carey 2011, Koszewska 2013, Cowan–Kinley 2014, Razzaq et al. 2018). Contrastingly, hypothesis *H3b* was not confirmed, i.e. more specific environmental attitudes, such as consumption- and production-related environmental concern, have no significant influence on the dependent variable.

The study has partially confirmed hypothesis *H1*, results pointing out that acquiring information on environmental protection from newspapers increases concern about sustainable fashion, while obtaining information from the Internet shows no significant impact on the dependent variable. The outcome can be accounted for by the fact that Romanian citizens tend to read newspapers mostly on the Internet, wherefore it is conceivable that we are witnessing the merging of traditional and new media when looking at these results. Of the eleven sociodemographic variables, only one proved to be significant, namely the proxy variable for the financial situation: difficulties paying the bills result in a reduced support of sustainable fashion. This way, the partial confirmation of hypothesis H4 has been obtained. The other hypothesised status variables, such as educational attainment (H2) or subjective social status, did not prove to be significant explanatory variables.

Table 3. *The significant determinants of concern about sustainable fashion*

	Coefficients		**t-values**	**P-value (t)**	**VIF**
	B	**Beta**			
Concern about environmental problems (E9)	0.794	0.389	11.403	0.000	1.489
Environment protection – personal importance (E1)	0.419	0.166	4.887	0.000	1.469
Difficulties paying the bills in the last year (S9)	-0.644	-0.162	-5.642	0.000	1.053
Sources of information on the environment: total newspapers (E7)	0.417	0.070	2.496	0.013	1.007
Adjusted R^2	**0.316**				
F-statistic	101.946				
P-value (F-statistic)	0.000				
Number of observations	874				

Source: authors' computation

Notes: B – Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Beta – Standardized Regression Coefficient, VIF – Variance Inflation Factor. For the sake of simplicity, only variables with significant effects are presented in the table.

The Internal Structure of Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion

Principal Component Analysis was performed in order to explore the internal pattern of the attitudes towards sustainable fashion. The variable "second-hand clothing should be promoted more" (e.g. through tax cuts) (QA13_3) was left out of the analysis due to its cross-linkages with a high factor weight, wherefore the final, two-factor model consists of nine variables (*Table 4*) and explains 57.1% of the original variance. The analysis is based on the Kaiser Criterion and Varimax rotation, the KMO[9] value of the final model is 0.906, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (approx. chi-square = 2,754.700; p = 0.000). The value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.86, which means that the internal consistency of the variables corresponding to the specific factors is very good.

The studied variables can be thus grouped into two factors as follows: the main component includes eight out of the nine attitudes on sustainable fashion, also comprising a variable against environmental consciousness, i.e.: "Clothes should be available at the lowest possible price, regardless of the environment or the working conditions under which they were made." At the same time, this reflects the position adopted in the literature claiming that approaches on fashion are not independent of the price criterion, consumers showing a positive attitude towards the topic in cases when sustainable fashion does not entail extra payment (Niinimäki 2010). Accordingly, the first factor variable was termed "Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion". The second factor contains a single variable, namely the attitude pointing against environmental consciousness, consisting of the statement: "Not interested in how environmentally-friendly the clothes are."

The results obtained are consistent with previous literature observations suggesting that consumers tend to associate a number of imperatives with ethical fashion (Reimers et al. 2016, Magnusson et al. 2017). Even though the variables adopted herein are different from the items studied by the various authors,[10] it also becomes apparent in our context that attributes and consumer expectations related to sustainable fashion are not in the alternative, as respondents attach importance to all of them.

9 The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test measures sampling adequacy for each variable in the model and for the complete model.

10 Compared to Reimers et al. (2016) and Magnusson et al. (2017), our items did not contain any attitudes referring to animal welfare, and even though our items are directed towards workers' welfare, environmental protection, and the impact of fast fashion, the formulations of the items are different from those used by the quoted authors.

Table 4. *Results of the exploratory factor analysis*

Factor	Item	Factor loading	Communality	Variance (%)	Cronbach's alpha
Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Clothing at Low Price	QA13_4	0.768	0.592	45.7%	0.860
	QA13_5	0.766	0.588		
	QA14_3	0.758	0.581		
	QA13_1	0.732	0.536		
	QA14_1	0.679	0.495		
	QA14_2	0.678	0.512		
	QA13_2	0.673	0.471		
	QA13_6	0.654	0.439		
Not interested in how environmentallyfriendly the clothes are	QA14_4	0.961	0.924	11.4%	–
Total Romania	**9**			**57.1**	

Source: authors' computation

As a further step, we have verified our hypotheses also for the factor variables. Once again, we made use of the explanatory variables presented in *Table 2* and the linear regression addressed in *Table 5*. Our first factor, the "Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion", includes eight out of the ten studied variables, wherefore it comes as no surprise that we have obtained only a slightly different result from the regression model of the combined scale discussed earlier (*Table 3*). The explanatory power of the model has mildly improved (35.1%), and – as already seen in the case of the combined scale – the first factor, too, shows the strongest correlation with the "awareness about environmental issues", followed by the level of importance individuals attach to environmental protection. Thus, yet again, hypothesis *H3a* has been confirmed. In addition to gathering information on environmental protection from the press, our model was supplemented by acquiring such information from online sources, whereby this way of enquiry also comes in support of the transition to sustainable fashion. Hence, hypothesis *H1* is also confirmed, allowing us to concur with literature findings claiming that the strong presence of sustainability in new media increases consumer sensitivity to the topic (e.g. Vehmas et al. 2018).

Table 5. *The significant determinants of the factor "Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion"*

	Coefficients		t-values	p-value (t)	VIF
	B	Beta			
Concern about environmental problems (E9)	0.419	0.407	12.216	0.000	1.514
Environment protection – personal importance (E1)	0.248	0.194	5.890	0.000	1.479
Difficulties paying the bills in the last year (S9)	-0.208	-0.104	-3.726	0.000	1.060

	Coefficients		t-values	p-value (t)	VIF
	B	**Beta**			
Sources of information on the environment: total social networks / the Internet (E8)	0.162	0.074	2.665	0.008	1.047
Sources of information on the environment: total newspapers (E7)	0.199	0.067	2.440	0.015	1.017
Adjusted R^2	**0.351**				
F-statistic	96.461				
P-value (F-statistic)	0.000				
Number of observations	883				

Source: authors' computation

Notes: B – Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Beta – Standardized Regression Coefficient, VIF – Variance Inflation Factor. For the sake of simplicity, only variables with significant effects are presented in the table.

Finally, we attempted to identify those explanatory variables associated with environmental consciousness and sociodemographic features that account for the second factor including the variable "Not interested in how environmentally-friendly the clothes are", which becomes markedly distinct following the analysis of the main component (*Table 6*).

Table 6. *The significant determinants of the factor "Not Interested in how environmentally-friendly the clothes are"*

	Coefficients		t-values	P-value (t)	VIF
	B	**Beta**			
No. of environmental protection actions in the last 6 months – summarized the 14 possible mentions (E3)	-0.096	-0.177	-5.487	0.000	1.007
Children in the household (S7)	-0.201	-0.099	-2.612	0.009	1.384
Household composition/size (no. of persons) (S6)	0.065	0.095	2.594	0.010	1.302
Employment status (S8)	0.173	0.084	2.524	0.012	1.071
Adjusted R^2	**0.041**				
F-statistic	10.967				
P-value (F-statistic)	0.000				
Number of observations	930				

Source: authors' computation

Notes: B – Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Beta – Standardized Regression Coefficient, VIF – Variance Inflation Factor. For the sake of simplicity, only variables with significant effects are presented in the table.

The explanatory power of the model is low (4.1%), and we can see that the increase in the actually pursued environmental activities generates more interest in the environmentally conscious manufacturing of clothing articles – yet another

evidence backing *H3a*. Three other sociodemographic variables were found to correlate with disinterest as follows: employment status and increase in the number of household members increase, while "the number of children in the household" variable decreases disinterest in the environmentally conscious manufacturing of clothing articles. Should we attempt to connect our results with previous literature findings, we will see that, indeed, having children makes people more open to environmental protection and environmentally conscious consumption (e.g. Ščasny et al. 2012, Norum–Norton 2017). The result we have arrived at, i.e. employment status (which in principle puts us in a better financial situation) does not favour interest in sustainable fashion – which may seem strange and contrary to *H4* at first glance –, is understood as a phenomenon attributable to the low purchasing power that is characteristic of Romania. Given that employed individuals must spend more often, and thus larger amounts, on wearing apparel, which is not backed by most work organizations as such, it may be assumed that they take more price-sensitive decisions on this matter, hence opting for cheaper and less environmentally conscious clothing items. This finding reinforces theoretical observations, discussed in relation to the various factors, according to which consumers tend to hold a positive attitude towards the topic at hand when sustainable fashion does not involve any extra payment (Niinimäki 2010).

Conclusions

One of the cornerstones of the *Green Deal* programme launched by the European Commission is the textile industry, making fashion industry a sustainable sector,[11] in the light of which initiative getting to know the citizens' opinion on the matter is vital. Ten statements were adopted in the research in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of citizens' attitudes towards sustainable fashion in the Member States. The vast majority of these statements is centred on issues related to fashion production and marketing. Having said that, these questions do not revolve around the environmental footprint of fashion production and recycling exclusively, but they also cover some aspects of sustainable fashion that touch on ethical considerations such as the moral treatment of employees. This group of statements also includes items that address consumers' information needs and the pricing of sustainable fashion products, these being some of the major causes behind consumers' acting dismissive towards sustainable fashion (Niinimäki 2010, Cervellon–Carey 2011, Liu et al. 2020).

The analysis of the ten Likert-type statements shows that, in principle, the studied aspects of sustainable fashion production are important for Romanian consumers. Certainly, their answers may reflect the influence of social desirability

11 https://tinyurl.com/62sjbapz (last access: 04.11. 2022)

(Carrington et al. 2010). Given that the ten statements are coherent, we created a cumulative scale variable on the one hand and examined the items with an exploratory factor analysis on the other. In the latter case, we managed to distinguish a main component consisting of eight statements, which indicates that the aspects of sustainable fashion are not a matter of either/or for the respondents. Over and above employees' ethical treatment, product durability, recycling, environmental protection, certification, and providing consumers with transparent information, the low-priced marketing of sustainable products is not to be ignored either. This outcome points to two major directions: when compared to other research, consumers give weight to several facets of sustainable fashion (Reimers et al. 2016, Magnusson et al. 2017), which thereby means a lot more in consumers' eyes than the no-far-to-seek environmental sustainability. Secondly, sustainable fashion goes hand in hand with the preference for low product prices even at the attitudinal level.

The present research covered the attitude factor, which should be understood as one of our study's limitations by virtue of the ethical consumption gap discussed in reference to the topic at hand. A look at the concrete actions reveals that consumers are much less committed towards sustainable fashion in what they do than in what attitude they adopt (Carrington et al. 2010). Therefore, we can propose the hypothesis that the higher price range of sustainable fashion products represents a major external obstacle for the Romanian customer base to take concrete actions.

We employed a linear regression analysis to determine the variables that have significant influence over attitudes towards sustainable fashion. Several hypotheses have been formulated based on the literature, one of which has been clearly demonstrated, namely that the primary source of the attitudes towards sustainable fashion is environmental concern in the general sense. The obtained results fit into the literature trend under which environmentally conscious individuals are more committed to sustainable fashion. Curiously enough, we have failed to confirm the impact of the more specific environmental concern (*H3b*) on our dependent variable. Respondents indicating their agreement with the necessity of changing the way we produce and consume in order to properly address environmental issues did not show significantly more commitment towards sustainable fashion. These results also point out that even though consumers set store by each and every one of the studied aspects of sustainable fashion, wherefore it cannot be reduced to environmental sustainability alone, the root of these attitudes is still to be found in environmental consciousness in the broader sense.

Sensitivity to this topic is increased by environment-related information acquired from omni-channel media consumption. From a sociodemographic perspective, however, we can assign a less coherent profile to attitudes in

support of sustainable fashion when compared to other countries in our region (e.g. Koszewska 2013). Better financial situation and having children constitute the variables that drive these attitudes. It cannot be claimed that we are dealing with an attitude linked to higher status and metropolitan residence and pointing in the direction of conspicuous consumption. If we accept that our analysis functions as a predictor of concrete actions, then it can be established that the primary consumers of sustainable fashion products will be individuals who are environmentally conscious, well informed on green topics, and better off, but also those who will give preference to products with a rather low price range.

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 53–76

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0003

The Legacy of Katharine Hamnett's T-shirts. Fashion as Activism

Krisztina MARÓY
Moholy Nagy Art University, Budapest, Hungary
&
GLAMOUR Hungary
maroykrisztina@g.mome.hu
krisztina.maroy@glamour.hu

Abstract. For a long time, fashion was only a novelty, an aesthetic pleasure, a means of individual self-expression, a possession (Veblen 1899), and a means of separation (Simmel 1904). In the last more than thirty years, following a change of attitude, fashion has also become interpretable as a medium of social activism. It no longer seeks to shape only wearable products and the style of their wearers but also the world (Fuad-Luke 2009). This essay interprets the career of British fashion designer Katharine Hamnett and her 1984 media scandal as the starting point for a shift in attitude, when fashion and social engagement became organically linked and dress became a means of bringing social and ecological issues into focus, beyond itself. Drawing on case studies, the essay explores the changing narrative around clothes, raising current issues such as the importance of using organic cotton as a raw material, the role of the active citizen, the limits of growth, or the meanings constructed by marketing. Although Hamnett's work has received undeservedly little discussion, she has an undeniably important role to play in changing this narrative. Today, thanks to her activist design, social responsibility has become a fundamental principle in branding. We can never talk about fashion in the same way as before Hamnett.

Keywords: fashion, activism, marketing, contemporary trends

Introduction

Does fashion have a role to play in changing the future? It certainly does, as there are few media in the world with as much influence as fashion. As Keszeg (2022: 207) argues, the creators of contemporary fashion have now admitted that fashion must give up "the role of dressing up the body and covering it with textile in the physical sense, and it should interpret itself as a medium not only through the

medium of the physical body". To change our throwaway society, which knows no limits (Sedláček 2012), huge communicative power and speed are needed. My hypothesis is that fashion has a unique opportunity to play its part in creating a more liveable society and preventing ecological disaster. Lipovetsky (1987) argues that all cultural industries are driven by the struggle for novelty and diversity, and follow the logic of fashion, with the goal being nothing less than immediate success. Fashion as a medium lends itself to activism that seeks to change the world, to speak out and address various social problems, to stand up for important causes, and in addition to be a great vehicle for information, it has plenty of problems and issues of its own to solve.

As Jean Baudrillard (1997) put it, pleasure in fashion is a cultural phenomenon, but we pay a high price in terms of waste, a price that everyone seems to accept. I will use the career of British fashion designer Katharine Hamnett, who has been a major activist beyond the world of fashion, to demonstrate that Baudrillard's pessimism is unjustified, that fashion and activism are now intrinsically linked, and that the involvement of the wider society has just begun. Designers who actively reflect on public affairs, and active citizens who follow their example, can shape not only fashion but also our society.

In any case, we are changing, and the question is whether for the better or for the worse. Are we pursuing or creating ideals that are liveable or unliveable? According to Lipovetsky (1987), it is up to us because fashion spreads both bad and good things, and it is our responsibility to exploit the interest that is bound to be generated by the emergence of new fashion trends, and we decide what to spread with it. Lipovetsky (1987) thinks that it is a mistake for thinkers to stigmatize fashion and consumer society because, in his opinion, only desires can help improve society.

How Far Does Fashion Extend?

Overruling Barthes's (1999) view that the semiotic system of fashion is arbitrary and therefore cannot be taken seriously, Svendsen (2006) argues that the situation has changed, and fashion is now considered important enough to be given the attention it deserves, or, on the contrary, it has become so important because of the attention it receives. In the interpretation of the field and the definition of its social role, we have long gone beyond Simmel's (1904) definition that fashion is produced by the desire of the higher social classes to separate themselves from the lower classes and, as a result of the democratization of fashion and the success of the ready-made garment industry, beyond the unidirectional mechanism of action whereby new fashions can only come from the upper social classes. An analysis of contemporary trends shows that in the 21st century, fashions, modes,

and hype from marginal groups and subcultures are just as important in changing our habits and the fashion industry as a whole (Maróy, 2020). Conspicuous consumption, as described by Veblen (1899), which drives the constant renewal of fashion and allows fashion products to appear interesting and attractive only for a short period of time, shows this phenomenon from only one aspect, that of the demonstration of social status, but today's moderate consumption and non-consumption are just as trendy, which is precisely the opposite of the stigmatizing view of fashion as having no message or effect other than to inspire consumption (Press 2018). This approach ignores the fact that dress, the wearing of clothes, is a socially embedded necessity with multiple meanings and effects.

According to Lars Svendsen (2006), academic discourse also follows the logic of fashion, for example, in terms of which topics and authors are considered currents and which are less so. In his opinion, it would be naive to believe that only rational considerations are driving these intellectual trends, since they are based on changing tastes as much as garments are. Svendsen (2006) does not see much difference between fashion and philosophy in this respect although, as he puts it, philosophers react much more slowly to change than those working in the fashion world. We should also take into account what Simmel (1904) said, claiming that fashion as a social fact is a non-cumulative change of cultural characteristics – it arises from the basic tension of the social condition of human beings. He says there is a strong link between fashion and identity, and we all accept this claim. It can be seen, therefore, that for several reasons, it is not useful to exclude fashion from the range of socially defining factors; in fact, it is a mistake not to include it in attempts to resolve current social problems.

The Surfeit and the Turn

Žižek (2008: 27) argues that in our "post-ideological" world, the basic attitude is one of cynical detachment, of denial of capitalism, that based on this basic attitude we continue to consume fetishized goods and see money as omnipotent, and that capitalism is essentially based on denial. How can we overcome this deadlock?

It is pretty much clear to everyone that T-shirts costing a few euros, clothes that can be worn only twice are not in our long-term interest. Influencers and celebrities have never been seen in the same outfit twice in the past few decades, sending the message: you need something new, everything is disposable. Here is the "Eden" where we are slowly drowning in our own textile junk. In the early 2000s, fast fashion companies changed the rhythm of fashion, replacing the traditional two-season (spring-summer, autumn-winter) collections with thirty to fifty collections a year (Siegle 2012). This has led to a level of overproduction that has inflated the values of fashion.

In her Anti-Fashion Manifesto, Edelkort (2015: 4) explains why she believes that marketing is to blame for the expansion of manufacturing in fashion and uses the powerful phrase that marketing spreads products like viruses. In her view, marketing is to blame for the fact that, as she writes, "saturation is slowly turning travelling global consumers away from too much sameness and overexposure".

Veblen's (1899) law of conspicuous consumption describes a social compulsion to display status, to put the "I can afford it" on display for the public. In this case, that is precisely the goal in showing status: to wear very expensive pieces, and as this trend becomes widespread, to show that we can always buy new garments. Social expectations therefore influence the pace of development in fashion. In Veblen's time, the opinion on the master of the house was the main compelling force. In a mediatized world, the desire to relate to and resemble the stars, along the lines of the parasocial interactions described by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl (1956), have become the driving force behind fashion in the golden age of television. In this digitalized world, it is the amount of Instagram likes and the pressure to communicate that have caused fashion to move at an unsustainable pace, where the pressure to post, influencing the recipients, the followers of fashion, and the endless opportunity to show ourselves have become a driver of waste.

Gernot Böhme (2016: 16) identifies the state in which we live as the "discontents of prosperity". He explains that, although the current standard of living is much higher than previously, no one is satisfied with what they have achieved. In his opinion, our lives are determined by the pressure for growth in capitalist societies, and he believes this claim is relevant not only in the field of work but also in leisure and education. In his view, desires are the guarantee of growth in aesthetic capitalism. He says that because of this pressure – that nothing is (good) enough, nothing can stay the same, we always need something new, we always need more – we are now living our lives as a kind of stress. This feeling is making more and more people in affluent societies think and want to live differently, want to change. Byung-Chul Han (2019) speaks of a meritocratic society replacing a disciplinarian society, where we have gradually got rid of negativity and switched to an all-powerful positivity. In his opinion, unlike in previous societies, our present society is characterized not by prohibition and restriction but by infinite possibilities, and he points out that this kind of freedom does not mean freedom from constraints and limitations but that the momentum of freedom actually disappears here because it does not derive from negativity but from infinite positivity. In other words, people have not become freer, they have just made themselves part of a performance-oriented society by choice. In Han's (2019) view, we pay for the compulsion to fully realize our potential, to increase productivity at all costs, with depression and burnout.

There is no doubt that we have reached a turning point in many ways in our lives and in fashion as well. Since the late 1980s, the unsustainable fashion

industry has been dominated by a kind of activism that not only wants to offer aesthetic experiences and new looks to people but that also inspires a rethinking of the norms of our society.

The Connection between Fashion and Activism

Fashion is not just about what we wear and how we wear it but also about the values we live our lives by. Fashion activism, as Hirscher (2013) puts it, is related to political activism, a participatory approach, empowering the consumer with knowledge and tools. As Von Busch (2008) argues, a designer, or, using his term, a "hacktivist", is not a design genius in the classical sense but rather a facilitator, an envoy of collective change. Heller and Vienne (2018) draw our attention to the problem that designers coming from mostly minority groups, without any financial support and significant income, make their designs for the sake of a particular cause, driven by the desire to solve problems, and that very rarely do they receive recognition or active participation from dominant groups. The authors also summarize what design activists think could help responsible design to become more widespread. Prominent among these proposals is the need for a change in the way our society interprets success. The authors also highlighted the need for a social movement for right action instead of capitalism.

This is in line with the idea expressed by Stella McCartney, one of the most successful design activists, at the launch of her Spring/Summer 2022 collection, arguing that designers should not only redesign clothes but also reshape people's mindset. This collection also marks the debut of Frayme, first ever mushroom leather on the catwalk, a bag made from the now perfectly viable alternative to animal leather, which is expected to revolutionize the fashion industry.

Heller and Vienne (2018) define transformational design as people-centred, interdisciplinary processes that aim to bring about sustainable, behavioural, and formal changes in individuals, systems, organizations, often for progressive goals. An activist designer is also an active citizen, who is not distanced from public affairs and social issues. Hirscher (2013), referring to Fuad-Luke (2009), explores the concept of fashion activism as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of activities, whether inspired by political, social, environmental causes, the fashion industry, fashion consumption, or design. Von Busch (2018) also identifies various forms of fashion activism such as open design, fashion hacking (which involves appropriating and redesigning what already exists), co-design, slow fashion, craft, DIY, upcycling, and modular design. Looking ahead to the future, following activist designers, a much more active fashion audience is also seen emerging.

Consumption and Activism

It seems to be a rather controversial relationship, but can the power of consumerism be used to address important issues? Does fashion have critical potential? There was a time when politics was considered taboo, and fashion brands avoided taking any kind of position, but the situation has changed quite a bit by now. There is a sense of pressure from customers who want companies to stand up for important causes. Today, a brand is eroded if it has nothing more to say than itself, if it does not address important issues. As Young (2018) puts it, whether or not brands are determined to be on the right side of history, this is no longer an issue that can be taken lightly, and while there will always be those who cannot reconcile themselves to the controversial idea that brands, with their inherent capitalist mission, are entering the realm of social justice, the situation is already given.

Source: Courtesy of Katharine Hamnett

Picture 1. *Hamnett's T-shirt encouraging environmental activism*

At times, successful designers such as Stella McCartney, Vivienne Westwood, or Katharine Hamnett, who have championed social and ecological causes, are labelled as hypocrites in an attempt to discredit the otherwise very positive work these designers are doing to change the fashion industry and, more importantly, the way people think (Young 2018). Eco-consciousness is becoming increasingly popular. Hamnett, for example, realized early on that she needed to use the specificity of fashion to get her message across, the fact that her T-shirts would be copied everywhere. If this is how the industry works, copying designer pieces,

she thought she should take advantage of this, using her designs to spread socially important messages such as raising awareness of the ecological disaster.[1]

Žižek's "antagonistic tension" describes the current social conditions well:

> man as such is "a wound of nature". There is no return to balance, in harmony with nature's milieu. To accord with his milieu, the only thing man can do is accept fully this cleft, this fissure, this structural rooting pot, and to try as far as possible to patch things up afterwards; all other solutions – the illusion of a possible return to nature, the idea of a total socialization of nature – are a direct path to totalitarianism. (Žižek 2008: 33)

Analysing the current situation, Böhme (2017) criticizes the pressure on growth, citing an important textbook in the industrialization of agriculture, Justus von Liebig's *The Application of Chemistry in Agriculture and Plant Life*, as an example. In his view, the transformation of agriculture is an example for everything we have to worry about today: the capitalist transformation of the mode of production, the move away from the land, the proletarianization of the former rural population, water shortages, the toxic effects of pesticides, desertification, famine, which is a frequent consequence of cotton production, and so on. Along the lines of the landmark book *Limits of Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972), Böhme goes through the last fifty years, highlighting aspects that were not yet visible to the authors (although they later updated their prognosis), and concludes that if everyone in the world aspires to have a Central European standard of living, and if developing countries are to catch up, the developed countries should stop growing, but it is just the opposite that is apparently and perceptibly taking place. Growth, as Böhme argues, helps to maintain social stability, balancing the constant tension between capital and labour, but referring to a recent publication by the Meadows group of authors, he considers it important to note that if we are to overcome the growth imperative for ecological reasons, we need a non-capitalist form of economy. We need to change at the level of social behaviour, and in this we can be inspired by artists who can lead the way.

There is an alternative to inaction in fashion, even if it sounds naïve: to try to improve, to keep filling in the gaps, to make the mass production of fashion less damaging to nature, more transparent, more controllable, to keep questioning political systems, to demand answers, to participate in shaping our lives. Designers can make a difference through their creativity, and customers as wearers of garments can contribute to change using the surface of their bodies and making conscious choices for purchasing goods.

1 See: https://tinyurl.com/5n95d7fr (last access: 10.07.2022)

The Beginning of Change: Katharine Hamnett's Revolution

Susan Strange (1986) uses Keynes's (1936) term "casino capitalism" to describe financial markets. She claims that everyone is affected by what has happened, as the financial system of the Western world has been transformed, which is mostly driven by factors similar to gambling. Unlike the casino, which you can stay away from, in the financial casino we are all unwitting participants, with inflation and unpredictability affecting all our lives. In Strange's view, the social and political turmoil between 1965 and 1985 was caused by this uncertainty. It was in this era that Katharine Hamnett, who soon became critical of the fashion industry and capitalism, became a designer in an industry where overproduction and inflation in the value of products were already causing serious anomalies. Fletcher (2008), while stressing that fashion is at the heart of our culture and has a major impact on our relationships, argues that, at its worst, it creates insecurity, peer pressure, uniformity, and a disconnection from real values, hence using Lee's (2003) colloquial term McFashion. Egri (2019) draws a parallel between fashion and capitalism. She argues that the former creates an illusion of novelty, while the latter, following Walter Benjamin, creates an illusion of progress.

Source: Peter Lindbergh, Getty Images

Picture 2. *Katharine Hamnett advertisement, circa 1984*

Edelkoort (2015) notes that one of the root causes of the problems in the fashion industry is that education and institutions train catwalk fashion designers, individualistic stars who are discovered, promoted by luxury brands and turned into pop culture icons. According to the trend researcher, this era is over because this method places designers outside society, and as such, it is an outdated approach. Keszeg (2022) draws our attention to the fact that, according to Varga Somogy's 2012 summary, it is the system that makes it difficult to achieve this degree of personal freedom although capitalism has the potential for the moral supply of authenticity encoded in it.

Katharine Hamnett's career as an activist designer clearly shows that the great realm of fashion is not defined by theorists but rather by fashion designers. It is very important for fashion designers to define themselves and what fashion means to them, as they can influence people on a wider scale. Hamnett is also a perfect example because she first followed traditions, the necessities of the system in which she was socialized, and then she was able to look at design as an activity in a different way, and over time she changed what had to be modified to become an active part of our ultra-modern society.

Success, Fame, Money, Glamour

Hamnett went to Cheltenham Ladies' College, a boarding school attended by upper-class children, where girls were required to wear double underwear, as described in a 1990 *Vogue* article following a conversation with the designer. "You may come out of a school like this as a rule-breaker, but you never forget the rules", she says (Woods 1990: 120).

She originally wanted to be a film director, but her parents said there were no female film directors, so she studied at the prestigious Central Saint Martins fashion school. She did make a few films for her own brand though during her career. In 1968, Katharine found the mini student uprising – which resonated with the events in Paris, where a strong critique of capitalism and consumerism was being expressed – upsetting. She felt she was in the right place, she knew what she wanted to learn there, and she did not want to be hindered by such disturbances.

She founded her brand in 1979, and her first collection was sold out at Joseph's. Admittedly, she spent the first period of her career wanting to become a famous fashion designer and rich. She wanted to make her clothes available in as many parts of the world as possible. That was the definition of success for her. "I was riding high, driving around a Mercedes all the time, it was parties all the time…" (Mower 2017). When Katharine was on her way to fame, there was no social media, but you could dress up actresses and rock stars who were seen as goddesses and gods. Her creations have been worn by Elizabeth Taylor,

Mick Jagger, Princess Diana, Madonna, and George Michael, among others. The reputation of some of her pieces has certainly surpassed the most-liked post of any social media star today. Yet today, the British designer's name is unfairly little known, even among fashion-savvy groups, and even fewer know that the T-shirts with slogans were her brainchild.

> But it got to this point in the late 80s and I had won designer of the year and all that, and it seemed like you just couldn't do anything wrong. We were very badly behaved. Our skill was staying out of the newspaper, which I would really congratulate myself to my grave that we did. Because we were really naughty and the worse we were, the more they loved us. In the end, I just thought this is too fucking easy, this success is actually boring. (Bumpus 2017)

Choose Life

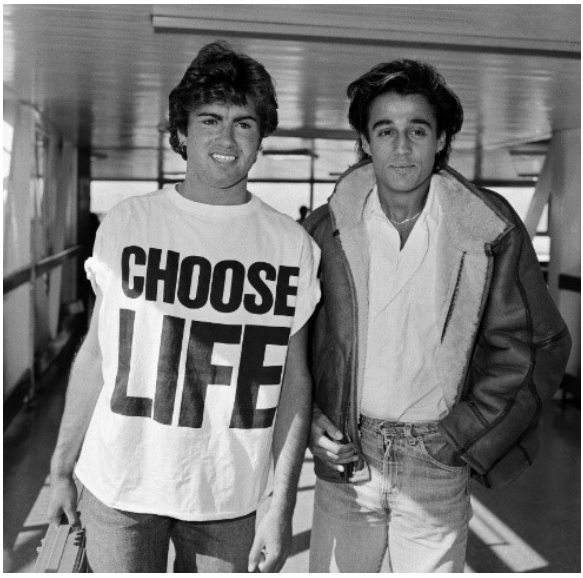
Nothing would have stopped her from building a brand with stores in every major city if she had not changed her worldview. Her awakening to environmental awareness is also due to the birth of her sons. "Before I had kids, I was a selfish bitch from hell" (Eyre 2008). This is how she described herself even more harshly, including a swearword. However, with the arrival of her sons, her approach to fashion changed, and she no longer thought that her work as a designer was unrelated to important social issues. Hamnett could have been a celebrated fashion designer, bemused by her own creativity, releasing more and more ambitious collections one after another, like so many others. She was, after all, the first recipient of the British Fashion Council's British Fashion Designer of the Year award, and by the 1990s her brand was a multimillion-dollar business. At the beginning of her career, she adopted the familiar dynamics of the fashion industry, and gradually, not overnight, she moved away from this pattern, but she was ahead of everyone else. In a 1985 appearance on Thames Television, where she showed some of her outfits on models, she said this when reporter Michael Barratt made jokes about the clothes: "The clothes will be relevant in six months, you can't expect them to be relevant now" (Barrat 1985).[2] So, even here, she believes the constant *tabula rasa* principle should be observed. Over time, however, a moral sense kicked in.

Hamnett became an activist as early as 1983, with her Choose Life T-shirts (Choose Life is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism), each of which had an environmental commandment written on them in the eye-catching block letters of tabloid covers: Stop Acid Rain, Save the Rain Forest. George Michael sang the Wham! hit Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go in a T-shirt with Choose Life on it, drawing even more

2 https://tinyurl.com/bdzzskae (last access: 10.07.2022)

attention to Hamnett's work. In a 2017 article on George Michael (see *Picture 3*), Hamnett mentions that the maxim "Choose life" is borrowed and hacked by the author Irvine Welsh, who turns its meaning into irony (Flynn 2017). This would later appear in the film *Trainspotting*. Here, the consumer society is presented as an alternative to a heroin-addicted lifestyle: "Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television. Choose a washing machine, cars, compact disc players, and electrical tin openers. Choose good health insurance, low cholesterol and dental insurance. Choose fixed-interest mortgage repayments. Choose a starter home. Choose your friends. Choose the future. Choose life" (Boyle n. d.).[3] The slogan "Choose life" later became a hashtag on Twitter in 2017, standing up against Donald Trump's policy.

The pop culture references to the T-shirts with slogans are rich, with Duran Duran, Queen, and Boy George wearing them to convey political messages to their fans, and there was also a T-shirt in the TV series *Friends*, worn by a character called Ross. "Slogan T-shirts are designed to put ideas in your brain. They make you think, and hopefully do the right thing", Hamnett said in a press release.



Source: Getty Images

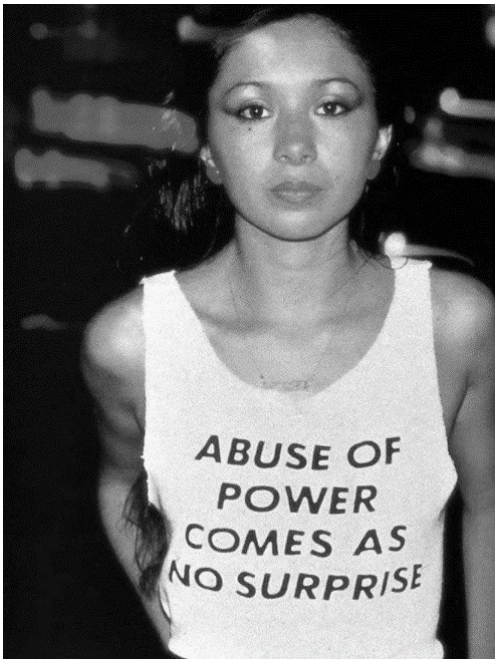
Picture 3. *George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley, 1984*

Two types of activism can be distinguished: participatory and demonstrative. In this essay, I will focus only on demonstrative design and will not mention the variations of design that involve the audience in creation, such as "craftivism".[4]

3 https://tinyurl.com/2s35m8ud (last access: 10.07.2022)

4 A concept created by Jayna Zweiman, one of the founders of the Pussyhat Project.

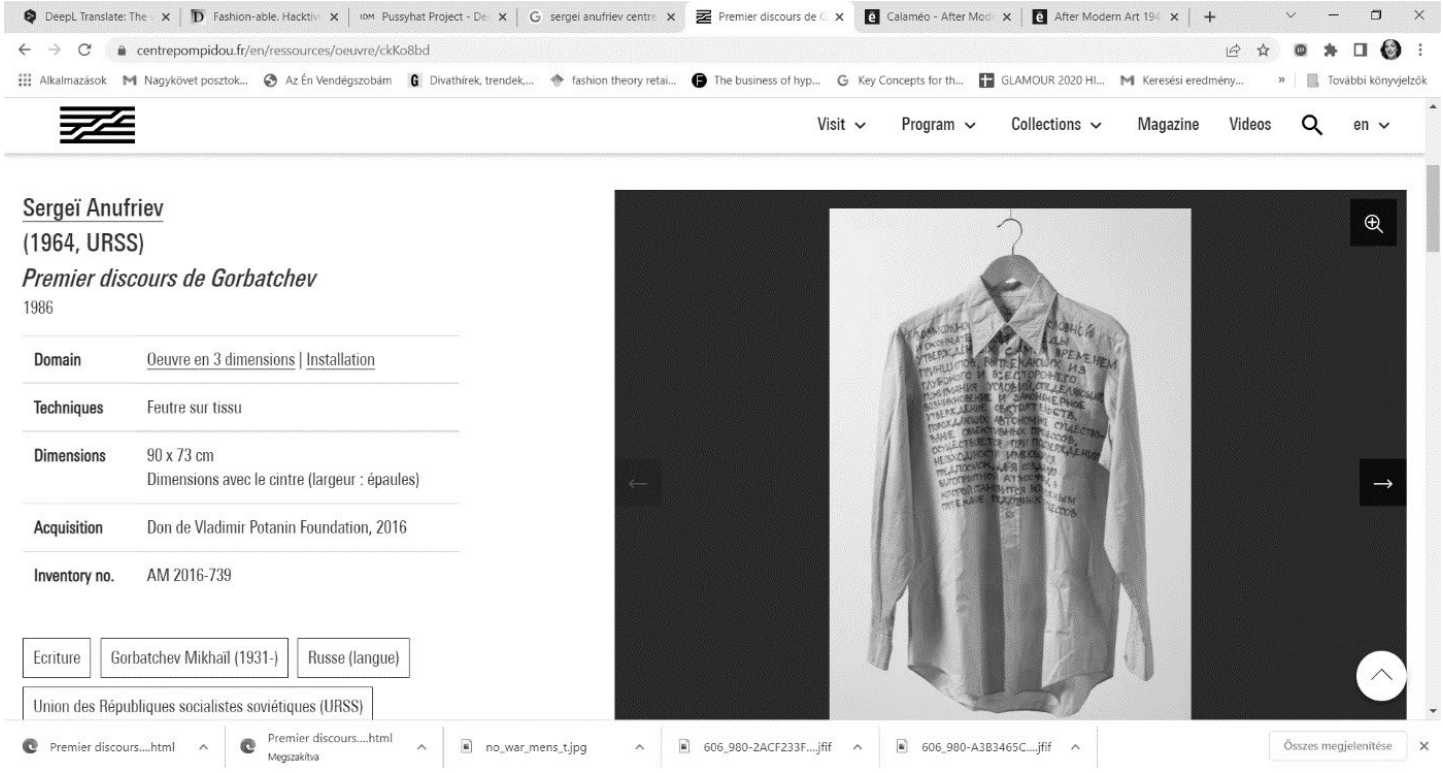
The 1983 work of American artist Jenny Holzer is a good example of demonstrative activism, which involves design within art. New York graffiti artist Lady Pink, one of Holzer's collaborators, is shown wearing a T-shirt with the words "Abuse of Power Comes As No Surprise" (see *Picture 4*). The image is part of Holzer's Truism T-shirts series. The photo, taken in 1983, became an Internet meme in 2017, when it was widely shared online in response to the #MeToo movement.



Source: Elaphant.art

Picture 4. *Jenny Holzer, Abuse of Power Comes As No Surprise from the series Truism T-shirts, 1980, worn by Lady Pink, 1938 Lisa Kahane, NYC*

Bartlett (2022) describes three creative methods linking creation to politics in her work *Objects, People, Politics: From Perestroika to the Post-Soviet Era* using the object typology concepts of "austere", "fragile", and "unruly". One of these, austere, is the closest to Hamnett's creative method. Bartlett (2022) uses a piece by Sergei Anufriev, a leading member of the Conceptualist Art Movement in Moscow, as an example, which is on display at the Pompidou Centre. The artist wrote Gorbachev's first speech on both sides of a uniform men's shirt, representing socialist simplicity, puritanism, and low quality, in felt-tip pen and displayed it on a hanger (see *Picture 5*). In fact, Anufriev's work is a call to "implement Gorbachev's words", promising radical economic reforms and market socialism, a change of our world.



Source: Pompidou Centre, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/ Georges Meguerditchian

Picture 5. *Sergey Anufriev, Gorbachev's first speech*

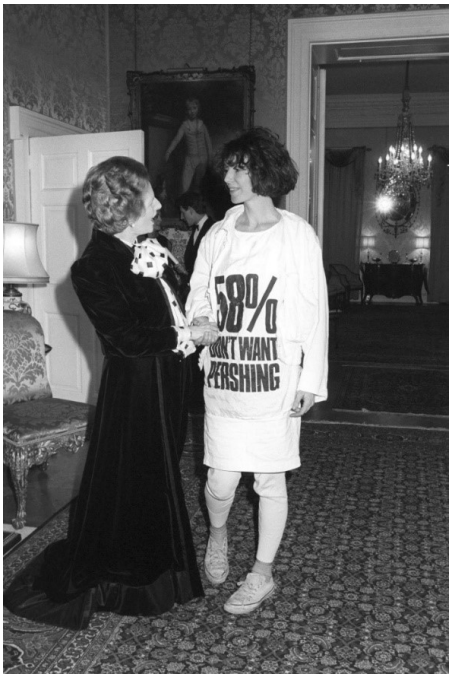
Katharine Hamnett's T-shirts reflect current political events in a similar way, but her aim is clearly social criticism, promoting the role of active citizenship. While Anufrijey's shirt with Gorbachev's words on it is "just to look at" in the museum, Hamnett's T-shirts take part in the everyday life of society, in a T-shirt and jeans set on Monday, in a party set with lurex trousers on Friday. Hamnett has never sought to cross the boundaries between fashion and art and does not aspire to have her work displayed in museums, although her clothes have, of course, been exhibited, most recently in T-Shirt: Cult – Culture – Subversion at The Fashion and Textile Museum, London, in 2018. Rather, she wants people to carry these messages in their everyday lives and to bring them to the attention of others by wearing them. Hamnett's space is the street, not the museum, and she wants to set the fashion.

The Media Scandal

One of the most memorable moments in the fashion history of the 20th century was certainly in 1984, when Hamnett shook hands with then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher wearing a T-shirt printed with an anti-gun protest sign (see *Picture 6*). Obviously, all photojournalists on duty took a picture of Thatcher posing for a performance protesting her own policies. The image has spread throughout the world and has since been featured as a statement on the designer's website, alongside a photo of her receiving the Order of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth much later in 2011. It is interesting that the *Vogue* magazine of the time does not mention this, although it does mention the reception Thatcher hosted, but the main question of the article is how to promote British designers in America, the names that are already known overseas (*British Vogue* 1984/July: 160).

But how did Hamnett become a sophisticated design activist? In 1984, after winning the Fashion Designer of the Year award, she was invited to a reception celebrating British designers at 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's residence. "Jasper Conrad (also a major British designer) told me: 'Why should we go and drink white wine with that murderess?' and I agreed. But then I had this idea. I went quickly to a photographic studio and had the lettering done on linen, which I had to stitch on the T-Shirt, so it wasn't far off a proper sandwich-board outfit" (Eyre 2008). When they arrived to the reception, she was asked for her jacket, but she said she was cold and would rather keep it on, so when she arrived to shake Thatcher's hand, she unzipped her jacket and the letters became visible: 58% Don't Want Pershing, i.e. 58% disagree with the deployment of missiles (currently in the Falklands), i.e. with the further build-up of arms. At the time, the United States was deploying a ballistic missile in British territory, which was directed towards the Soviet Union. "...which was totally undemocratic. Wearing that on a T-shirt was the best thing I could think of at the time" (Eyre 2008). Almost immediately, Thatcher noticed from the increasing flashes of the cameras

that there was something fishy going on, so she said: "You seem to be wearing a rather strong message on your T-shirt" (Hamnett 2018).



Source: Getty Images

Picture 6. *Katharine Hamnett and Margaret Thatcher, 1984*

The concept of a T-shirt with political slogans was born, and Hamnett continues to this day with timely designs such as Use Condoms in 1987, World Peace Now in 1988, Cancel the Third World Debt in 1990, and her latest, highly successful collection, Vote Trump Out in 2020. These T-shirts are written in very simple language, and they are for everyone, capturing the spirit of the times. "The tragedy is that they are even more relevant now than they were when I started making them forty years ago", says Hamnett (2018). There is no doubt that all over the world, every week, we could be protesting with new T-shirt slogans against injustice, inhumanity, and political decisions that threaten our future.

The Importance of Raw Materials and Organic Cotton

For decades, Hamnett's collections have been raising awareness about pollution (Save the Sea), social responsibility (Clean up or Die), and the overriding truth that life is the greatest value (Choose Life). She says that when she was rethinking

her own fashion brand, she looked at how her company was doing related to the basic tenets of Buddhism, such as "do no harm". It was a realization that changed everything for her. She is a fashion designer who quotes Aristotle in her interviews and draws inspiration from Buddhism. "Aristotle asked: What is good life? You can live a good life and have a good death but what good is that you damage generations to come", asked Hamnett in a *Vogue* interview, in response to a journalist's question (Mower 2017).

During her change of perspective as a designer, she became concerned about the large number of people dying from poisoning caused by pesticides used in cotton production. She no longer thought she had a choice but to demand transparency in cotton production. She no longer thought that the overproduction of the fashion industry, with its severe environmental pollution, was not her business, and that she was only interested in shop windows and profits. Rather, in Hamnett's opinion, fashion should get involved in communicating social and political issues, so she could not remain silent and could not keep an "elegant" distance. Her T-shirt with the slogan "No more fashion victims" is a reference to the fact that farmers in Africa and India are forced to sign contracts that require the use of toxic pesticides or to the inhumane conditions of workers in the fashion industry. According to Aristotle (1997), good is the best and most perfect virtuous activity of the soul. The fashion industry, operating for only profit and nothing else, in no way falls into the Aristotelian category. "It's shocking that it's not a vital part of the [fashion education] syllabus. The actual design and conception of product – it's the fate of millions of farmers in agriculture", she says (Bumpus 2017).

Source: Getty Images

Picture 7. *Katharine Hamnett in a Protect and Survive T-shirt designed to show solidarity with health workers during the COVID-19 outbreak, 2020*

The damage caused by the fashion industry could, in Hamnett's opinion, be most effectively reduced by the careful selection and modification of raw materials. In a 1990 *Vogue* article, she gives her opinion on all the raw materials and the problems related to their production. In summary, the big problem in cotton production is caused by pests and the chemicals used to control them. In the case of viscose, wood pulp is produced in the third world under toxic conditions, and forests are cut down. She is against wearing fur and leather, as it requires much more land to keep animals than to produce other foods (Woods 1990: 114). Hamnett considers the switch to organic cotton to be the most important, as it would eliminate pollution and poisoning, and it would also allow cotton to be grown in a rotating system, which would enable farmers to produce food, making them self-sufficient and helping to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere. In 2008, in a film promoting organic cotton, she says that the fashion industry is not interested in this problem because it is more insensitive than customers (Swarup n. y.).[5] According to Hamnett, the environmentally conscious production of cotton is just as good as the pesticide-treated version, so we no longer have to sacrifice our high aesthetic standards if we want to buy ethically made clothes. The Katharine Hamnett brand uses only organic cotton and is transparently made in Italy, but Katharine makes a strong statement: "I don't want to look 'eco'. People don't buy things out of pity. People buy the things that make their pulse race, the things they love. Ethical clothes have to be beautiful and they have to be mainstream. The big companies can drive demand, they need to go organic to make a difference" (Eyre 2008).

The difference between today and 2008, as Hamnett argued, is that customers want fashion companies to offer eco-conscious, responsibly produced products. Public opinion has changed, and there is genuine, constructive interest, with a growing percentage of customers turning to more sustainable shopping and expecting companies to operate transparently. According to Linda E. Geer of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, it is a useful force, but it will also cause a lot of frustration (Kent 2021).

> Companies can get consumers bamboozled by information that doesn't actually mean anything, or which is meant to be a kind of PR exercise, as almost anything can be called sustainable or having a lower impact etc. I think we are at a moment when we have a danger of doing that, and when it will breed tremendous public cynicism, and a kind of backlash against the companies that do this. It will also be very frustrating to government efforts to try to straighten these things out. The reporting of what really matters here is actually not that mysterious or difficult, so I could see a

5 https://tinyurl.com/mr4tdkvz (last access: 10.07.2022)

clear future path for what data needs to be collected and what data needs to be reported (by a fashion company), and I can imagine a world where we could all agree on that fairly rapidly.

Source: Courtesy of Katharine Hamnett

Picture 8. *Fashion Hates Brexit T-shirt, 2019*

An Active Citizen Is the One Who Is Fashionable

Hamnett's career has been characterized by her opposition to dysfunctional systems and power or to those that do not serve the people. However, she also spoke out against Brexit, saying the post-Brexit trade deal would be disastrous for British fashion and could destroy the "Made in Britain" brand, now synonymous with the best quality in Japan and Southeast Asia. In her opinion, this trademark is apparently dead. As Hamnett puts it, some British brands have already given up exporting because high tax rises and foreign shipments do not allow them to compete on the international scene (Newmann–Cordell 2021).

One of the most defining pieces of Hamnett's career is the slogan T-shirt. In her view, there is nothing left but our bodies to write messages on. In 1984, in an article in *American Vogue*, Marshall Blonsky summarizes Hamnett's activities: "Her clothing and imagery express the concept: Protest the system with the only thing inalienably yours – your body" (Blonsky 1987: 468).

Source: courtesy of Katharine Hamnett

Picture 9. *Hamnett calls for participatory democracy*

Hamnett calls for action, to cause trouble and social upheavals instead of maintaining the "spectator democracy" described by Byung-Chul Han (2020). With her "Make Trouble" T-shirt, she says the following to us, the citizens wearing garments: "Wake up. Be informed. Question everything. Stand up for your rights and the rights of all living beings. How? Take action. Vote. Protest. Boycott. Write to your MP. Ask those questions. Push the boundaries. Make good choices" (press release by Hamnett).

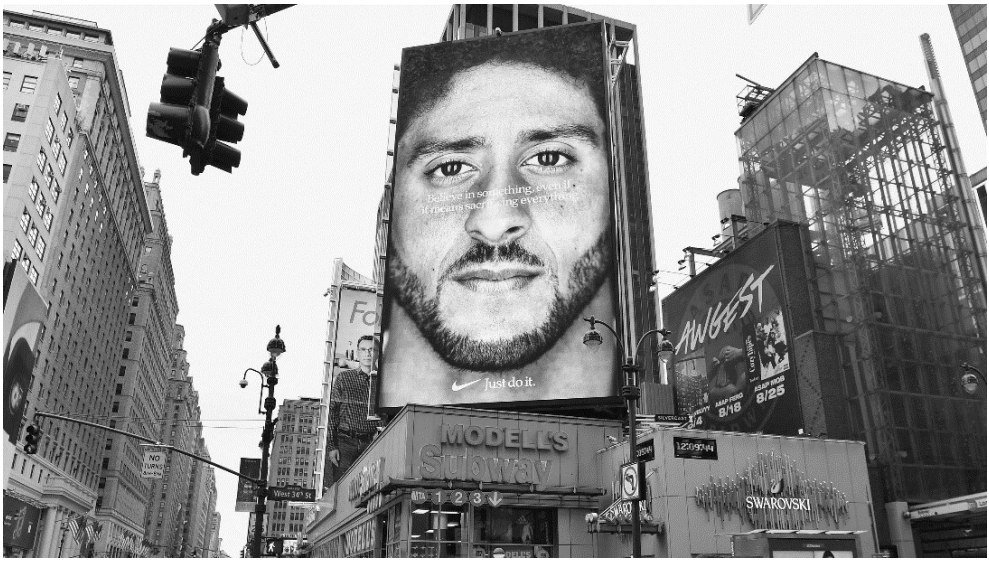
Can fashion, as opposed to "like capitalism" mentioned by Han (2020: 26), help "dislike capitalism" to come into action? Will people's realization of the power of their purchasing power and their ability to use that power to control and manage systems make a difference?

Activism as a Marketing Tool

There is also a theory that brands and activists step into the vacuum created by political leaders because they cannot remain silent when those who should be doing their job do nothing, when those who are responsible are not doing their job. A striking example of this is Nike's campaign, featuring American football player Colin Kaepernick, who was the initiator of the U.S. National Anthem

protest. The essence of this act of social protest is that athletes do not stand during the national anthem but kneel down on one knee, protesting against racism and police brutality. Kaepernick said: "I cannot stand in salute to the flag of a country that oppresses black people and people of colour." Nike's sales rose dynamically after the campaign (CNBC 2018).[6] We should also mention the other side, who say that fashion and sport, or other cultural fields, have nothing to do with political issues. According to journalist Sly Tang, we should see a significant minority of US consumers who find it uncomfortable for a brand to raise political and social issues. In his view, this is a dystopian future in which big businesses take on the role of moral policing (Young 2018).

Nike's campaign even led to a book on why sport should not be concerned with politics. As the author of the book, Clay Travis, puts it: "Sport was our national connective tissue, the place we all went to escape the serious things in life. It didn't matter if you were a neurosurgeon or a janitor, everyone's opinion was equal" (Travis 2018: 25).



Source: Getty Images

Picture 10. *Colin Kaepernick in the Nike campaign: "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything."*

An important question is how to keep messages without losing their essence when something from the subcultural medium is absorbed into mass fashion? According to Svendsen (2006), these meanings, these extra contexts, automatically become empty and disappear at the level of the masses. How can we make the

6 https://tinyurl.com/bdcrz66m (last access: 10.07.2022)

question of our future part of people's thinking, part of the present, in a culture where, according to Mark Fisher (2020), we focus only on the present and the immediate? Does fashion have a choice other than to be very consistent in trying to make its audience with distracted attention aware that they need to change, that they need to become activists themselves, that they need to use the power of their consumption to change the world?

In my opinion, it is not the crippling criticism of consumerism but the activation of consumers and the introduction of and the emphasis on the concept of moderation that can bring about a change from the current unsustainable situation. As Klein (2015) puts it, change is something we cannot do individually but as part of a huge, organized, active movement.

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 77–96

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0004

Exhausting Beauties, Fashion Faux Pas, and Sartorial Rights. How Fashion Shaped the Self-definition of Gen X, Y, Z? A Case Study of *Euphoria*, *Girls*, and *Sex and the City*

Anna KESZEG
Moholy-Nagy University, Budapest, Hungary
Babeş–Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
keszeg.anna@mome.hu

Abstract. The article focuses on fashion consumption patterns emerging from prominent TV series that have created generational fandoms. Three series (*Sex and the City*, *Girls*, and *Euphoria*) representing the three most important generations (Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z) present in contemporary US society and global popular culture highlight the most mainstream contemporary fashion attitudes. Based on a deductive approach-based thematic analysis with focus on the semantic role of the dress played in the visual narrative, the research considers how fashion is used in building characters and their fashion- and clothing-culture-related values. The analysis concludes that the most important features of the generational fashion attitudes are as follows: materialist individualism for generation X, irony and anti-fashion for generation Y, and psychological coping mechanism for generation Z.

Keywords: generation theory, fashion consumption, popular culture, consumption attitudes, TV series

Introduction

From time to time, we witness the emergence of iconic cultural product creators and expressions of fashion fandoms (Laverty 2021, Butchart 2016, Bug 2020). From *Funny Face* to *Matrix*, from *Bonnie and Clyde* to *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulin*, the examples are countless, and there is no more eloquent contemporary illustration to this than HBO's TV show, *Euphoria*.[1] *Why Has Shock TV Show* Euphoria *Became Such a Drag*? (Horton 2022), *Cult Teen TV* (Nicholson 2022), *A Creative Triumph* (Deggans 2022), Euphoria *Fashion Goes beyond the Show*

1 The IMDB page of the show with information and trailers: https://tinyurl.com/27yj9jhn (last access: 05.11. 2022).

(WSJ Staff 2022), *How the Beauty of* Euphoria *Changed Fashion as We Know It* (Magliocco 2022) – these are only a couple of titles quoted from journal articles referencing the show. The looks of the series created so many challenges on social media that it was often read as an expression of generation Z's clothing culture. The generational approach was stimulated by the first moments of the show's first episode, where the protagonist, Rue Bennett, played by Zendaya, introduces us in her autobiography by self-narrating her birth on 11 September 2001. As the protagonists of the show are her schoolmates, the high school drama identifies as a coming-of-age story of zoomers (Katz 2021).

Between 2012 and 2017, another young adult drama, called *Girls*,[2] shared the same generational (life)style-defining role as *Euphoria* and became famous for showcasing the clothing choices and fashion consumption of millennials. In this case, the protagonist, Hannah Helene Horvath, was an elected voice of her generation not by a narrative argument but by self-description. She defined herself in the pilot episode as someone who might be "the voice of my generation – or at least a voice. Of a generation." A coming-of-age TV drama as well, *Girls* adopted an intriguing generational attitude willing to be a millennial response to the iconic and controversial TV series *Sex and the City,*[3] framed as a post-feminist drama of Generation X women working in high-profile jobs in New York city around the millennium. The three series played a somehow similar role for Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z (McCrindle et al. 2014) in the USA and influenced the global tendencies of fashion and global visual culture in a generational manner. The article uses the three generational signifiers in a seemingly essentialist manner, yet, as it will be underlined later, the three concepts have a rather operational value, given their recurring use in popular culture and everyday life.

The following arguments highlight what is so specific about the clothing culture of *Euphoria* by arguing that if we grasp the particularities of its fashion behaviour, we will arrive in a new clothing culture – adapted to an era defined by permanent crisis (in economy, in global physical and mental health politics of environmental issues, and, finally, in geopolitics). At first, we will demonstrate how and in what sense *Euphoria* can be read as a form of contemporary Zeitgeist, and by contrasting *Euphoria* with the culturally equally important series characteristic to millennials, *Girls*, and to Generation X, and with *Sex and The City* (*SATC*), we will outline a possible reframing of contemporary fashion attitude driven by new forms of fashion consumption. The comparison between these three, highly influent TV series will be made according to narrative categories as follows: the nature of storytelling and the seriality of the three shows, aspects of genre,

2 The IMDB page of the show with information and trailers: https://tinyurl.com/3h5t5nev (last access: 05.11.2022).

3 The IMDB page of the show with information and trailers: https://tinyurl.com/y3etx94h (last access: 05.11.2022).

the main characters, and the ways in which fashion and clothing became a tool of their profiling. Secondly, a short introduction will be made into generation theory and into the characteristics attributed to generations X, Y, and Z, with a special focus on attitudes towards fashion and clothing. And, finally, in the last subchapter of the article, we will focus on the fashion consumption highlighted in each series in order to define the clothing patterns of the three generations profiled in the shows.

Euphoria, Girls, Sex and the City. Three Generations in Popular Culture

SATC is one of the scholarly most cherished TV productions. Its popularity and the influence it had on lifestyle and fashion made it an exemplary case study for understanding the conflicting issues of (post-)feminism in late capitalist societies regarding issues of sexuality, friendship, and everyday material culture (fashion and consumerism) (Arthurs 2003, Gerhard 2006, Grant–Nash 2015, Akass–McCabe 2004), for creating a typical landscape of the postmodern metropolis (Richards 2010), for TV fandom analysis, and for local-regional differences of the reception of a global entertainment product (Yuang 2007). As for *Girls*, the reception focused on the love and hate relationship that audiences had with the show and on issues of authenticity (Woods 2015), post-feminist sensibility (Nash–Whelehan 2017), and representations of millennial culture (Crossley 2015, Blessing–Wezowiczki 2015). As for *Euphoria*, the academic discourse was mostly interested in the social media reception of the show connected to issues of substance abuse (Kaufman et al. 2021) and in the creation of a new discourse on sexuality and especially transsexuality (Macintosh 2022, Masanet et al. 2022).

Considered in a comparative perspective, *Euphoria*, *Girls*, and *Sex and the City* are only similar by their pop cultural influence; however, their differences are more striking when read in line with the visual, narrative, and production tendencies of their respective period of release. A dark teen show on drug consumption and constant sexual exposure (*Euphoria*), a satiric-realistic narrative monologue on the difficulties of young adults living with permanent anticipatory anxiety (*Girls*), and short, funny, sitcom-like glimpses into the glamourous yet hard life of the first generation of successful women (*SATC*) – these patterns have almost nothing to share. Yet the three narrative givens represent well the mainstream lifestyle of the three generations present nowadays in Western work cultures and illustrate how popular culture has darkened after the millennium, how the genres have shifted from comedy to dark drama, and how the on-screen most visible generation has become younger and younger. While the characters of *Sex and the City* were in their thirties, the *Girls* struggled with finding their life path in their

twenties, and, finally *Euphoria* focuses on burnt-out teenagers. Issues of mental health deepened and hardened with the younger and younger characters. Despite those differences, the role played by the importance of fashion and clothing in the life of the protagonists never faded away, and despite the new visual codes, it kept its quintessential function in their self-definition.

Euphoria is a TV show made by Sam Levinson based on an Israeli franchise with two seasons for the moment, interested in the daily problems related to drugs, violence, and sexuality of a group of high school students in California. The series premiered in 2019, and the second season was screened in early 2022 when the Russia–Ukraine war started and became a symbol of generation Z's social media protest against war and violence (Klee 2022). The main character of the show is Rue Bennett, who has a long history of drug abuse caused partly by a mental disorder of unknown nature and augmented by the early death of her father. While all the show's characters have a detailed psychological profiling, Jules is another central character standing out from the school community – given the role they play in the protagonist's life (a transgender character played by a transgender model, Hunter Shafer, celebrated as a first accurate mainstream representation of a non-binary person on TV; Allen 2019). Jules is a newbie to the community of Euphoria High and involved in a dark and dangerous relation of sexual harassment and physical violence with the father of the school's alpha male, Nate. The narrative structure of the show mixes the logic of series and serial structure. Each episode is connected to the others by the same storyline of Jules's harassment, Rue's drug addiction in the first season and her deeper and deeper involvement in drug trafficking, and a story of catfight between the two most influential girls of the school in the second. Yet, the larger storyline belongs to a serial – the narrative logic of a series pops up, as the beginning of each episode is the life-story of one character with the role to highlight and deepen the main drama. The first season had an individual story at the beginning of each episode, while the second season played with the expectations of the viewer and included only two character stories due to the fact that, as Rue is the narrator and as her conscience is so often blurred by the consumed substances, she is not able to deliver a story in each episode. This approach opened the possibility of a flow-like narrative structure. The narrative complexity was completed by a visual style different in the two seasons and said to be an interpretation of Gen Z's visual self-representation in social media (Derschowitz 2022). The first season adopted a highly nostalgic 90s and 2000s disco glam style, while the second one addressed the trend of analogue image making and its burnt-out aesthetics. All these features highlight a quest for this generation's obsession with authenticity, present in the showrunner's interest in giving voice to the experiences of its characters. Hunter Shafer is known to be Levinson's consultant in building Jules's storyline, and she contributed to the writing of the season-independent episode filmed during the

pandemic and focused on Jules's character (*Fuck Anyone Who's Not a Sea Blob*, 2021). According to those features, the show is considered to be a "drama" using elements of crime, horror, and thriller.

The show has two other central aspects that enabled its success story as a generational Zeitgeist drama. On the one hand, the screenplay uses music as an immersive experience, characteristic for Gen Z's musical consumption: the show worked with the most important contemporary artists in developing an original soundtrack (Labrinth, Dominic Fike, Lana Del Rey). On the other hand, Heidi Bivens as costume designer and Doniella Davy as make-up artist created the looks of the show and invented the visual style that was appreciated by the show's audience as something very close to its own consumption patterns. Bivens, who is a late Gen Xer by birth,[4] worked with Angelina Vitto (a zoomer herself) and casted a lot of well- and lesser-known brands for building the wardrobe of the characters. In the reception of *Euphoria*, the names of the stylists were referenced as many times as the names of the showrunners, writers, and cinematographers (Ottenberg 2022).

As moral panic plays a major role in the reception of *Euphoria*, *Girls* was a show that "people love to hate" (*The Take* 2022). This show is also an HBO original developed by writer and director Lena Dunham, whose social media presence was surrounded by controversy at the time. The show was considered to be too white and too middle-class, and Dunham, the daughter of an influential New-York-based painter (Carroll Dunham) and a media artist (Laurie Simmons), was accused of nepotism. However, it cannot be denied that Dunham's work had a major global influence, and the way in which its creator navigated cancel culture remains a powerful example of millennial opinion making (Hawkman 2017). In 2013, Dunham was included on the *Time*'s list of the 100 most influential people in the world. Two Gen X executive producers left their fingerprint on the show, Judd Apatow and Jenni Konner. Apatow, whose name has become a brand name for realistic comedy mixed with romance and open discourse on sentiments and affects, and Konner, who self-labelled herself as a feminist TV writer, both played a legitimizing role in the show's success story.

Girls, screened between 2012 and 2017, had six seasons (a total of 62 episodes) and profiled four main female characters in their twenties looking for purpose and self-definition in New York. The main character, played by Dunham, Hannah Horvath, was an aspiring writer who went through all the possible miserable jobs of the creative industries a youngster could have in the previous decade in a global metropolis. As a reference to *SATC*, the show adopted the sitcom format of the iconic four and added to the cast three other characters: Marnie Michaels played by Allison Williams, Jessa Johansson played by Jemima Kirke, and Shoshanna

4 Here and in the following lines, we will use the generational descriptors in line with the mainstream definition of USA's generations. Cf. Dimock (2019), McCrindle–Wolfinger (2014).

Shapiro played by Zosia Mamet. Even though there are parallelisms between these characters and the characters created by Darren Star (the creator of *SATC*), Dunham's personages outstayed by their self-absorption and co-dependence, their relationships lacking both the security and the glow of mutual, unpraised support present in the former series. The narrative structure of *Girls* is the one of a classical series, with a coming-of-age storyline, meeting the protagonists at the beginning of their journey through the workplace and leaving them at the beginning of a new, very vague phase of their so-called adulthood. Practically, the show highlighted how hard it is for millennials to take life-defining decisions (finding their dream job, a lifelong partner, getting pregnant, accepting death, etc.), how they struggle with the plurality of choices, how the positive neoliberal message of "you can be whatever you want" became a threat and a burden for them. In this sense, *Girls* enters the tradition of the unusual coming-of-age stories of Judd Apatow's comedies from *Superbad* (2007) to the *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) and *Knocked Up* (2007).

The show's costumes were designed by Stacey Battat, a high-class costume designer and long-term collaborator of Sofia Coppola. What is interesting about *Girls* in opposition to *Euphoria* is that the latter show's visual style has nothing outstanding and can be labelled as realistic. Two elements need to be highlighted. The realistic framing of the visual narrative met the language of body positivity in the making.[5] Dunham's body in the series became the symbol of the millennial struggle with the unrealistic body standards of mass and social media. While the show addressed issues of everyday nudity, realistic body representation, we constantly witnessed the self-labelling and self-criticizing inner voice of the characters addressing their bodies. As sartorial choices are concerned, *Girls* worked with the difficulties of building up a wardrobe suitable for the adult life and played with on-the-edge outfits far from the glamourous and always well-put-together looks of *SATC*.

Sex and the City is a show that is very difficult to address given its spectacular cultural influence (Evelina 2022, Akass–McCabe 2004). Screened between 1998 and 2004, the show contributed to the understanding of post-feminist female condition and highlighted the complex role played by consumption in the identities of people living in late-capitalist societies. Watching *SATC* in 2022, after the pandemics, with a war situation in a neighbouring country and with the imminent possibility of a global energy crisis, became a very escapist and nostalgic

5 From the aughts, body positivity movements have become mainstream, highlighted by the publication of psychometrical research such as the Body Appreciation Scale from 2005. According to the scientific literature, the components of a positive body image are: body appreciation, body acceptance and love, broadly conceptualizing beauty, adaptive body investment, inner positivity influencing outer demeanour, and protecting filtering. In the case of *Girls*, we have examples for almost all components; only the inner positivity influencing outer demeanour is missing. For these categories, see: Daniels et al. (2018).

activity leaving a bittersweet impression of unrealistic white and upper-middle-class glamour and first-world-problem criticism. Yet we need to remind ourselves how liberating the show was by addressing and creating the visual and discursive ideology of post-feminism. Four female characters were the protagonists of the show, all of them having a professional identity defined by the most coveted jobs of late capitalism. Carrie Bradshaw played by Sarah Jessica Parker was a journalist who wrote a column on the sex life of New Yorkers and managed to maintain quite a high life standard from her columnist salary; Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) built a lawyer career and became a partner at a famous law firm in NYC; Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) worked as a PR professional with celebrity clients; finally, Charlotte York (Kristin Davis) had a job in the creative industries, being the curator of a commercial and competitive art gallery.

The show was created by Darren Star based on a book by Candace Bushnell, iconic author of the chick lit genre. Compared to the drama urge of *Euphoria* and to the realistic-sentimental comedy of *Girls*, *SATC* was deeply defined by the classic sitcom genre, and the twenty-something to thirty minutes format was rarely substituted with longer episodes (the series finale – s6, episode 20 – was the only one with a length of 45 minutes). In this case, the narrative structure preferred the serial format at the beginning of the show (during the first season) – each episode had an independent storyline linked to the subject of an article prepared by the protagonist. At the beginning, the show had a very social scientist vibe, as Carrie Bradshaw conducted a lot of interviews in order to obtain data on the sex life of her co-citizens, and the interviews framed the private life of the four main characters. What is more, the three other women were introduced in the storyline as subjects of Carrie's investigation; their role as BFFs[6] became clear as the show advanced. The serial-like logic entered the show with the leading male character, Mr Big, whose nickname became the symbol of the dating expectations of Gen X women. The main narrative arc of *SATC* was built on Carrie's and Mr Big's relationship, and from the second season the serial structure faded away behind the personal life events of the four main characters.

This evolution from serial to series implied a stronger connection with the romcom visuality, the raw and handheld-shot first season gained more glamour and classiness with the second season. As the names of Bivens, Vitto, and Davy became synonyms with *Euphoria*, Patricia Field, the costume designer of *SATC*, managed to have a label name in the industry due to the show (Soo Hoo 2018). Field comes from the sixties' tradition of self-curated fashion shops (she owned a store in 1966 in Greenwich Village), and she was asked to work on the show by Sarah Jessica Parker whom she met during the shooting of *Miami Rhapsody* (1995). As the costume designer of *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and *SATC*, she is the stylist of high-fashion-profile TV and movie productions of the Y2K.

6 BFF is a common abbreviation for "best friends forever".

The interest in finding the most influential fashion brands of the period was as important in her case as in the case of Bivens's and Vitto's, and, practically, Field invented Manolo Blahnik's, Jimmy Choo's, and Prada's cult, which became synonyms for *SATC*.

While playing with former narrative traditions and as examples of narrative complexity, the three shows have the common ambition to build ambiguous characters with a strong psychological profile. As part of this profiling, sartorial choices and consumption patterns are created for the characters based on the professional work of the most coveted costume designers of the industry. As costumes, fashion, and dresses play a similarly important role in all three cases, we can proceed to the description of each generation based on the method of literature review and to finally highlight their fashion attitude as reflected in the three series.

Profiling Generation X, Y, Z

A question of relevancy can be raised to the previous arguments: how a comparison between three generations can be accurate when the life stage at which they are presented is quite different? How can we compare Gen X persons in their thirties to Gen Y characters in their twenties and Gen Z people in their teenage years? Further, in what sense can such general labels as the ones of the three generations have a heuristic value? The answers allow us to easily get to the subject of this subchapter. As many authors underline this, there is a serious difference between the coming-of-age processes of those three generations, and the self-awareness of adulthood comes at an increasingly younger age, while financial self-support gets more difficult to attain (Savage 2007). As concerning the use of the generational labels, we will gather a couple of arguments in the following, yet it is to mention above all that the media coverage of the series used the generational labels as their main frame of understanding.[7]

These affirmations need to be contextualized within the confines of generational theory, a social scientist approach to the contemporary living population that became very popular and whose mainstreamization raised a lot of questions concerning its applicability. The theory of the generations considers that groups

7 Edmunds, Joshua. 2022. Generation Z's Cultural Comment: *Euphoria*. *The Daily Targum* 10 February (https://tinyurl.com/32kjr8kr (last access: 05.11.2022); Li, Shirley. 2022. The Gen-Z Drama That Launched a Million Memes. *The Atlantic* 3 March https://tinyurl.com/2s36yt8x (last access: 05.11.2022); Wright, Jennifer. 2017. Why *Girls* Made Us Hate Millennials? *New York Post* 8 April https://tinyurl.com/mubuw6jf (last access: 05.11.2022); Shinfuku, Kristi. 2017. With *Girls*, Lena Dunham Created and Destroyed a Millennial Reality. *Consequence* 10 February https://tinyurl.com/bdh332z5 (last access: 05.11.2022); Cf. the reddit thread *Sex and the City Belongs to Gen X (Apparently) https://tinyurl.com/3kaw8vc3 (last access: 05.11.2022)*; Silva, Belisa. 2020. How *Sex and the City* Shaped a Generation. *Swaay* 18 Feburary.

or cohorts of people born and living in the same period (who have the same age) and the same geographic location, experiencing similar sociocultural processes share or tend to share similar ideas and attitudes because of the similar experiences and problems they encounter. The generation length in western societies is in the high 20s and can reach 30 years. The importance of the generational affiliation was addressed in its complexity for the first time by Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist in 1923, who argued that the historical events of a given period leave their imprint on the population's psychological character (Mannheim 1952). The idea of the generational differences was connected to the theory of repeating cycles and applied to the American history in the 90s by William Strauss and Neil Howe. They consider that the dynamic of generations is due to the fact that people from different cohorts attain a new life stage in a non-overlapping way and the differences in meeting new experiences creates a cyclic pulsation (Strauss–Howe 1991).

Even though generational theory was criticized because its negative labelling effects and its lack of empirical basis, the term's operational value gained in strength due to everyday use and presence in popular culture. Given the fact that the aim of this analysis is to identify generational patterns in the three above-mentioned series, we will adopt a seemingly simplistic approach to the three mentioned generations. However, we need to underline that generations are not homogeneous, as a lot of local versions, subgroups and sub-cohorts fragment each category. Yet, as the reception of the three TV shows used the general concepts of X, Y, and Z, we use the terms as a reference to this constructed meaning.[8]

In the USA, Pew Research Center produced a large amount of data used to define and profile the generations present in contemporary American society.[9] In our argumentation, those categories have an unbiased analytical value as they were used in journalistic texts and on social media platforms to characterize the three above-presented shows. Within the confines of this article, we agree with the heuristic value of those terms not in an essentialist manner but accepting their representational, labelling, and constructivist value. As the three shows were produced in the US and the media discussion was framed by categories concerning the US society, this article uses the generations identified in contemporary American society.

According to the mainstream definition of USA's generations, Gen X are people born between 1960 and 1979, who experienced radical political transition, a political discourse constantly shaped by the republican/democratic opposition, global geopolitics defined by the cold war and whose education and values were

8 For a critical, empiricist introduction in the theory of generational differences, see Parry–Urwin (2017); for a critique of the empirical approach and a return to the validity of the theory, see Lyons et al. (2015); for a reflection on the constructed nature of the concepts, see Eyerman (1998).

9 For those data, see: https://tinyurl.com/73bwkrv9 (last access: 05.11.2022).

defined by capitalism and meritocracy. The Gen Y, or millennial generation was born accordingly between 1980 and 1994 defined by a period of extreme globalization linked to the end of the cold war, a relative economic stability in their childhood, and the emergence of the Internet, the social media, and the conflicting opinions of techno-optimism and techno-pessimism. And, finally, Gen Z, or the Zoomer generation, born between 1995 and 2010, became the first generation of digital natives shaped by social media, mobility, and the idea of multiple realities driven by an increasing sense of ecological and economic crisis (Dimock 2019, McCrindle–Wolfinger 2014[10]). Compared according to their values, Gen X and Gen Y share an interest in the individual, Gen X persons being individualist, competitive, and materialistic, while individualism at Gen Y manifests in self-orientation, a harsh questioning of the core social values, and a globalist take on contemporary society. Compared to them, Gen Z has no interest in self-definition and values an undefined ID; they appreciate dialogue and community above all, with a preference for realistic approaches. Those behaviouristic values translate to status-oriented consumption for Gen X (interested in brands, cars, and luxury products), to experience-oriented consumption for Gen Y (they prefer festivals and travels and are interested in flagships which can deepen the experience of a brand and not in the products per se), and, finally, to ethical and unique, unlimited products for Gen Z (enabled by Web 3.0 technology) (Francis–Hoefel 2018).

The four decades in which we are interested in this article (1990–2020) coincide with the expanding globalization of the fashion industry when fashion creation underwent a process of extreme mediatization and the fashion designer's work was highly influenced by processes of brand management, brand communication, and fashion marketing (Pedroni 2013). *SATC* showed how the economic value of fashion had grown exponentially by the end of the 90s and that while fashion consumption became a major component of one's identity, concerns regarding the industry's influence on global geopolitics started to emerge. In this golden era of fashion consumption, the label of the "fashion victim" was not considered to be a threat yet, as yuppie culture legitimized over- and hyper-consumption. Consumers of Gen X looked for powerful brands that showed the social value of a person incorporated in a brand name. The seminal role that fashion, interior design, and material culture played in this period was highlighted in episode 9 of season 6 of *SATC* called *A Woman's Right to Shoes*, where the issue of the reproductive rights was not linked to a political-legal debate but transformed into an issue of lifestyles and a powerful argument against single shaming. In this episode, Carrie's Manolo Blahniks are placed on the same level as the other characters' kids as a symbol of the economic and social investments of a single character. It is utterly important that the right to shoes does not apply to any kind

10 With a special focus on Australia, McCrindle and Wolfinger's book gives a global overview on the different local/cultural versions of generations present in the world.

of shoes but exclusively to Manolos. The logic of competition and the economics behind a wardrobe full of expensive clothes define how this generation approaches fashion and has interest only in luxury brands. Charity shops and second-hand clothing are present in two-three scenes during the show, but they are only there in the case of Carrie, the economically less stable character, who has the most exquisite fashion choices between the four characters.

The value of consumption and fashion labels decreases in the case of millennials (Yadav et al. 2019). In this case, self-expression outgrows the importance of the brand name. DIY clothing experiences, unusual and ironic combinations define the clothing culture of millennials. The urban subcultures of this generation from hipster to normcore are all attitude-based: there are no trendy brand names or dominant clothing items in those wardrobes, while an ironic attitude towards wearing whatever we have seen already in a satirical, anti-fashion-like manner singularizes clothing culture. The fashion experience of this generation was the most interested in pushing fashion to its limits by taking back the most ordinary clothes that the street culture ever invented and transforming them into coveted trendy garments. In the endless processes of self-questioning of millennials, everyday looks are as conflicting as identity issues: a character can have a very well-put-together, preppy look one day and look like an outcast the day after. These shifts between social roles are not even defined by the everyday duties – they are in accordance with only one thing, the person's present psychological attitude. Satire, irony, and a suspicion towards expectations linked to status dressing define the clothing culture of this generation. The depreciation of status dressing causes a strong interest in expressing political activism by fashion and clothing.

The fashion choices of gen Z are like a synthesis of the previous two fashion attitudes mixed with a stronger sense of activism and a mainstream attention towards sustainability. The interest of zoomers in brands and luxury items is as strong as in the case of Gen Xers mixed with a steady need for creativity and authenticity characteristic for millennials – which creates a demand for professional-looking unique clothes produced by brands acting for a cause and having an eco-conscious manifesto. Even if it looks like a fashion heaven, zoomers' fashion consumption is the most ambivalent among all. Their conviction that only eco-conscious and socially responsible brands are to be trusted pairs with a growing consumption of fast and hyper-fast fashion clothing (Stringer et al. 2022, Deeley 2021). Considered to be the most pragmatic generation in this trio, there is no brand fetishization in their case, and the irony behind millennial clothing culture seems meaningless to zoomers. As millennials struggle with self-definition, Gen Zers consider that an undefined identity leaves room for a lot of interesting experiences and personas during a human lifetime. And from here emereges a highly self-conscious clothing culture interested in the mediatic power of our dressed bodies and an interest in brands that manage to redefine the human body.

Table 1. *A comparison between Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z based on attitudes towards consumption and self-definition*

Zoomers	Millennials	Gen X
Self-awareness	Self-growth	Self-expression
Pragmatism	Irony	Competition
Professionalism	Creativity	Materialism
Status and identity	Identity and status	Status
Undefined identity	Self-questioning	Meritocracy

Source: Francis–Hoefel (2018)

In order to grasp the presence of these realities in the three TV shows, we will apply a deductive approach-based thematic analysis with focus on the semantic role of the dress played in the visual narrative. As the three shows encompass a large set of visual material (94 episodes for *SATC*, 62 for *Girls*, 19 for *Euphoria*), the analysis focuses on only one character from each show, the one whose fashion choices were the most copied in social media and the most reflected in the visual narrative. In the case of *Girls* and *SATC*, the choice is obvious, as Carrie and Hannah Horvath are the narrators of the story, and their sartorial experiences are the most highlighted. However, in the case of *Girls*, Hannah's style is not the most visually compelling one (Jessa, Shoshanna, and Marnie all have a more interesting fashion path than hers), yet the importance that self-reflectivity plays in the case of millennial fashion attitudes justifies the choice of Hannah as a representative voice of her generation. In the case of *Euphoria*, the question of representativeness needs another methodological framing: in this case, Rue is the master voice of the series, even if her interest in fashion is faded by her interest in drugs, love, and all those substances that can make life bearable for her. The show's most outstanding visual style belongs to Jules, and the social media reception of her outfits justifies her choice as the sartorially representative character of the series. Jules was the most copied and most discussed character of the show on social media.[11] In the analysis of the three characters' fashion behaviour, we will focus on four issues, highlighted by research on fashion attitudes: (1) the visual style or urban subculture represented by the character, (2) the attitudes towards clothing in general, (3) the attitudes towards the body, and, finally, (4) the attitudes towards labels, brands, and shopping.

11 Cf., for ex., an interview with Hunter Shafer on those issues: Shattuck, Kathryn. 2019. Enthralled by 'Euphoria'? Hunter Schafer Knows Why (It's Because of Her). *New York Times* 7 July. https://tinyurl.com/mtey596m (last access: 05.11.2022).

How Sartorial Choices Build a Character?

Source: compiled by the author via Pinterest[12]

Picture 1. *Three outfits representing the characters of Jules, Hannah, and Carrie* (from left to right)

The only thing that Carrie Bradshaw, Hannah Horvath, and Jules Vaughn share is their ambition to find an authentic lifestyle good enough to bring happiness to them, while they all link somehow the concept of a fulfilled life to creative work. Fashion is not necessarily a component of this project for Hannah, a writer who completely neglects the fashion system, and her ambition to do so is the central element of understanding her fashion attitude. For Carrie, a writer herself, being fashionable is the most important element of her self-definition – fashion is the main object of desire, as important as romantic love, the ultimate goal of a successful life. For Jules, the stakes are different, as their ambitions are exactly in fashion creation, in reframing the fashion system in a manner that allows them to express their identity through a sartorially undefined body.

12 From left to right: https://br.pinterest.com/pin/322007442108189986/; https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/511580838896593796/; https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/302515299940533538/. (URLs last accessed on 05.11.2022)

Carrie Bradshaw practically adapted all the trendy visual styles of her époque: from the preppy ensembles required by the socially powerful jobs that women could attain to the boho-chic outfits of the creative industries, everything was present in her wardrobe. The two key components of her fashion attitude are trend-consciousness and the sense of mix and match. For Carrie, fashion and dress are a form of investment: she often claimed choosing shoes over food and housing projects. The material value of the wardrobe is a form of social and economic success, just as valuable as cars, housing projects, and expensive travels are for the other characters. The interest in fashion goes hand in hand with the interest in shopping and labels: as the famous alliteration of the first *SATC* movie suggests, labels and love are the two components of a happy life. Brand loyalty, brand awareness, and fetishization of labels such as Manolo Blahnik, Prada, Dior, etc. are the key components of a clothing culture where possession is the most important way to express a character's interest in fashion.

According to this system, the body needs to be like the body of catwalk models and must reflect a certain sexual and sexualized ideal: with every feminist ambition of the show, Carrie's body echoes the struggles of a female body acting for and against the male gaze. This ambivalence of Carrie's fashion attitude contributed to the conflicting interpretations of the show as both a feminist manifesto and a product of capitalism's consumerist repression of women (Arthurs 2003).

Hannah Horvath's interest in dress is shaped by anti-fashion and all the fashion subcultures that were framed by the sense of criticizing the fashion system. She adopts even the punk aesthetic for a moment, yet her styles are formatted by normcore, hipster and indie anti-labelling, preppy style, athleisure clothing, and a lot of DIY sartorial projects (Narbona 2021). As the interest in finding the authentic self is the most important for these characters, all fashion choices prove to be already experienced, not authentic enough for the characters. In the eighth episode of the first season, Hannah and her boyfriend, Adam, both wear an iconic pair of pyjamas, a similar unisex one-piece, cream sleeper with buttons on the front. These pieces of clothing used in the house and outside are a complete negation of the fashion system and the expression of the need to reinvent our relationship to clothes. In this attitude, there is no room for shopping, there are no labels, there is no social status, no power dressing, and there is no sexualized presence of perfect bodies. However, Hannah arrives to this fashion attitude at the most comfortable moments of her existence, when her co-dependent relationship with Adam is reassuring enough to act according to her deepest convictions. At other moments, she proves that she still has a huge wardrobe, invests her first considerable salary in a window-shopped designer dress, and spends a lot of time inventing unusual patterns and combinations. Labels and brands are not important for this type of sartorial culture: their presence is due to the generation's attempt to seek the recognition of Gen X, in a power position at the workplace. As possession and the

economic value of the dress is important for Gen X, for Gen Y clothes start to be an issue of storage and identify as garbage. The reinvention of our attitudes towards female and human bodies was the most important component of the show. Hannah's body was read in the critical reception of the show as the most iconic element of Dunham's message. An average female body with its normal features (small tits, a belly, a couple of kilos over the ideal body size, etc.) was in the premier plan of the screen at countless moments of the show and shaped the way of millennials through the democratization of the ideal body image of the show-business and the fashion industry. The male gaze in this show proves to be as childish and ironic as the self-reflection of women on their own body (Grant–Nash 2017).

In the case of Jules, we know less about their fashion attitudes, as their fashion choices are only present as visual stimuli and as a reflection of Jules's image in the eyes of the other characters. The most important feature of their physical appearance is its mesmerizing nature: the physical presence of the character is outstanding in every situation, and the visual framing of them identifies with a vision, a dream, an illusion – a surreal experience. The visual style of their outfits brings together elements from various Gen Z subcultures from the nostalgic Y2K outfits and the spectacular pastel Goth make-ups and theatre-costume-like accessories to the visual consciousness of the e-girl/e-boy aesthetics. The character was seen in a lot of difficult psychological situations through the show, and their outfit is never damaged by their mental condition (in *Girls* and *SATC*, the lack of interest in the creation of an outfit is always connected to the mental health of the character): Jules's looks are always very thoughtful and thought-provoking as if dressing up were their coping mechanism. When the identity politics of their body and existence are always in question, creating a vision of their body allows the character to experience a sense of wholeness. The search for uniqueness is present in every outfit worn by the character: even though labels are not as present as in the case of *SATC*, there is no room for the negation of the fashion system either. A strong fashion-, style-, and label-consciousness defines the looks of the character as if the whole history of human dress would be their playground. Even though the DIY and maker influence is as present in Jules's case as in Hannah's, their outfits are always professional, well-polished, and lacking that sense of childishness that was so present in the case of millennials. The body of the character was shown in many circumstances, letting the viewer identify its features, yet these visual frames never enabled a sexualizing approach, and the invention of the unique visual style of the narrative gave back the character its own self-reflecting voice. Simultaneously, in the case of other characters, the menace coming from the idealized bodies of the media industries remained a similarly important influence as in the case of *SATC*. *Euphoria* highlights well how the body-shaming discourses of the pre-millennial generations came back in the case of zoomers and how conflicting the body discourses of contemporary social media are.

Table 2. *A comparison of Gen X's, Gen Y's, and Gen Z's fashion culture based on the three TV shows' thematic analysis*

	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X
Visual style	Baddies Eclecticism E-girl, e-boy Pastel Goth Y2K DIY	Normcore Hipster and indie Preppy Athleisure DIY	Preppy Boho-chic Casual chic
Attitudes towards clothing and dress	Self-expression Identity politics and psychological coping mechanisms Authenticity	Self-expression Irony Rebellious negation of the fashion system	Self-expression Social status Self-rewarding consumption Mix-and-match
Attitudes towards labels and brands	Search for the uniqueness Seeking difference Consciousness	Window shopping ironized No interest in labels and brands Shared wardrobes Lack of interest in possessing material goods	Window shopping Fetishization of labels Possession Materialism
Attitudes towards bodies	Anti-labelling Screen-mediated bodies Workout and diet culture Ideal body shape imposed by the fashion industry	Anti-labelling body types and sizes Democratization of the ideal body Against the erotic and sexual discourse of the female body Nudity	Workout and diet culture Ideal body shape imposed by the fashion industry Sexualized body Rejection of nudity

Conclusions

The aim of the article was to identify how the three most representative TV shows of the three demographically most present generations in contemporary society showcased the generational attitude towards fashion, dress, and body. The three selected shows, *Euphoria* for Generation Z, *Girls* for Generation Y, and *SATC* for Generation X, were identified by the media as mainstream voices of the respective generation. The analysis pointed out how the serial and productional logic evolved from classic sitcom-like genres to thriller and drama in developing televisual coming-of-age stories. Even though the theory of generations has its defaults, within the confines of this analysis it proved to be helpful as an operational tool of analysis, as the three above-mentioned shows were framed

as popular cultural representations of the three generations on traditional and social media platforms. In the case of the three generations – as a literature-review-based analysis pointed out –, fashion is linked to identity politics defined by a strong sense of individualism. Even with the arrival of shared wardrobes, fashion stays a tool of differentiation. Yet, individualism means different things to the three respective cohorts: it means self-expression for Gen X, self-growth for millennials, and self-awareness for zoomers.

The fashion attitudes reflected by the three TV shows were highlighted by a thematic analysis focusing on the three sartorially most important characters of the shows, Carrie Bradshaw for *SATC*, Hannah Horvath for *Girls*, and Jules Vaughn for *Euphoria*. The thematic aspects considered were the visual style of the characters, their attitudes towards fashion and clothing, labels and brands, and bodies and body images. In conclusion, for Gen X, fashion stays a status symbol and is linked to economic success, and the material value of luxury goods plays an important role in identifying with the fashion system. The mix-and-match technique is the most valued and authentic fashion attitude towards a fashion system that still has the power to impose ideal body types – because for Carrie fashion can also feed you. For Gen Y, the rebellious attitude towards the whole fashion system became mainstream and went hand in hand with the devaluation of labels, of ideal body types, and of the whole idea of possession and investing in material goods. In this case, ironical DIY fashion projects and attitude-based subcultures characterized the show's fashion discourse. Hannah highlighted it as such: "They put me in a box and now I'm suffocating." With Gen Z, we can witness the creation of a conflicting fashion attitude where rebellion against the system, the extreme valuation of uniqueness is present, as well as a need to conform to ideal visual codes imposed by media and creative industries. Because, as Jules said it: "Real life is such a letdown."

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The Per(ver)formative Aspects of Pandemic Fashion Performances: Moschino's Deconstructive Marionettes[1]

Petra EGRI
University of Pécs, Hungary
epetra90@gmail.com

Abstract: It is said that due to the social and economic effects of the recent pandemic, fashion has been caught in a destructive position. One aspect is the material change of the fashion objects and the strong pre-eminence of the so-called "stay-at-home collections" against the earlier dominance of the ready-to-wear and haute couture garments intended for social events. An important feature of recent fashion changes is their reliance on current pandemic rules and the related political decisions. In my presentation, I will focus on an interesting example of these pandemic changes: Moschino's 2021 Spring/Summer Collection. Moschino's "Marionette Performance" is a perfect example for infelicitous performativity where the show is created in a *per(ver)formative* (in the Derridean sense) act in the catwalk space. I intend to show that performativity is broken at every step of the show. In this spring collection, not only are the mannequins substituted by dolls but the viewers – some are well known (e.g. Anna Wintour) – are also transformed into marionettes by Jeremy Scott. With a self-ironic gesture, anyone of us from the possible audience can be changed into a puppet. To analyse the performative character of the show, I use deconstructive approaches and ideas. I wish to emphasize the interweaving performative dimensions that, in a sense, preclude each other with the help of Paul de Man's interpretation of Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*. I want to point out the mechanical, meaningless materiality appearing in the marionettes' movements on Moschino's special catwalk. My lecture argues that in the movements of the marionettes the possibility of the clear manifestation of performativity becomes uncertain.

Keywords: deconstruction, fashion performance, marionettes, Moschino

1 This paper was supported by the (ÚNKP-21-3-II-PTE-1077) New National Excellence Programme of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

> Let us look at the matter thus: May we not conceive each of us living beings to be a puppet of the Gods, either their plaything only or created with a purpose – which of the two we cannot certainly know? But we do know that these affections in us are like cords and strings, which pull us different and opposite ways, and to opposite actions; and herein lies the difference between virtue and vice. (Plato 2016: 36)

Fashion and Pandemic: The Transformation of Fashion Performance

The fashion show is a social phenomenon; it has the performativity[2] that regulates and validates it as a given, convention-based activity. Recent initiatives aiming at the "transformation of the fashion show into a fashion performance"[3] (Evans 2001: 301) have significantly changed the performative nature, the rules, and the conventions of fashion events. The pandemic in the previous two and half years has been an essential factor in this change, resulting in the self-deconstruction of fashion performances. However, it is easily possible that the changes can also be interpreted as the effects of a broader transformation in the fundamental character of contemporary artistic processes, amplified by the pandemic.

One aspect of the pandemic transformation is a material change in fashion objects, the strong dominance of "stay-at-home collections" or "work-from-home collections" (e.g.: WFH Jammies or Christian Dior's Spring/Summer 2021 or Hungarian-based fashion brand Tomcsányi) over the earlier power of the *ready-to-wear* and *haute couture* garments intended for social events. These changes have transformed the design practice, creating a unique "pandemic fashion". Besides these facts, numerous other changes can be seen in the fashion industry.[4] A new emphasis, i.e. sustainability, has become crucial, but in general the whole fashion industry is undergoing a vast change (Nistor 2020). My focus is directed on a specific aspect: the recent fashion show changes directly connected to the current COVID-19 rules and restrictions and the related local and international political decisions. It is a fact that "while many brands chose to stage and record runway shows without a live audience, others created short films in which models showcased garments in a narrative format" (Domoszlai-Lantner 2020). In this general trend, memorable presentations include two short films by the House of Dior (Autumn-Winter 2020/2021)[5] and Moschino (Spring-Summer 2020–2021).[6]

2 On performativity, see Austin (1975) and Fischer-Lichte (2008).

3 On this, see also Duggan (2001), Evans (2003: 67–85), and Egri (2020).

4 As the fashion industry has changed, so has its media. E.g. the emergence of "Instagrammable fashion". See Keszeg (2020).

5 The House of Dior Autumn-Winter "fashion show", 2020–2021 https://tinyurl.com/3d66yfcv (last access: 05.07.2022).

6 The House of Moschino Spring-Summer "fashion show", 2020–2021 https://tinyurl.com/ae96hvv8 (last access: 05.07.2022).

Source: Style Magazine

Picture 1. *A short film by Dior in 2021*

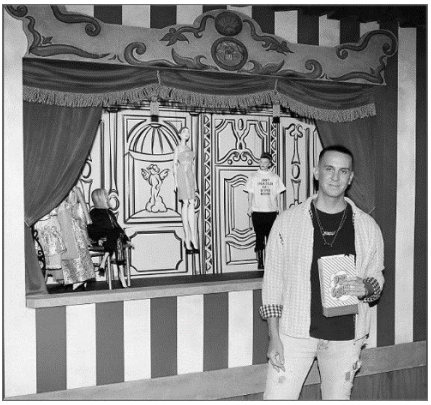
In the context of the pandemic, more and more fashion events are stepping out of the traditional framework, introducing elements of a theatrical nature and presenting a complex performance. The fashion show is thus not only a representative display of dressing possibilities in a specific space but becomes a kind of spectacular show of a particular type that seeks to convey subjective meaning, a message beyond the clothesline. In Alexander McQueen's famous turn-of-the-century fashion performances, for example, the personal sense of national identity or the traumatic experience of violence became the founding background of the fashion show. In my study, I analyse a fashion show – Moschino's 2021 Spring/Summer Collection – where the disruptive, destructive subjective backdrop of the pandemic transforms the simple fashion show into a complex, multi-meaning, allegorical-referential fashion performance that radically transforms space. The fashion show becomes an artistic event in itself.

Reading the Fashion Show through the Deconstruction of the Performative

I attempt to use the deconstructive "close reading" method of the Moschino presentation. Fashion shows and performances have their own (constructive) performative structure based on specific, accepted conventions. Moschino's "Marionette Performance" is a perfect example of the disintegration, of the perversion of such existing performative rules. We may even ask with Jacques Derrida how this *per(ver)formative* act (Derrida 1987: 136) is created in the catwalk space. The primary "perversion" is that the whole fashion show is turned into a completely alien genre, into a puppet show. The theoretical parallel

here in my interpretation will be Paul de Man's study (1984) on Heinrich von Kleist's essay on the marionette theatre (Kleist 1972). I want to show how regular performativity (Austin 1962), the accepted, fundamental system of rules of the fashion show is broken at every step of the show. The resulted show product rewrites the standard and validates conventional rules of the fashion show. The Moschino show disrupts and deconstructs at once the formal order of the fashion show and reveals a hidden process that takes place in subjective depth and can be read in deconstructive and psychoanalytic ways.

The catwalk show of Moschino starts with a preparatory deconstructive narrative (whether it can or cannot be called a fashion performance will become apparent in my analysis). We are not watching a documentary fashion presentation at a real-life location but a fictional story shot on film and adapted to the medium of the short feature film. It has nothing to do with the previous fashion shows in real space, where bodies met. The starting scene, a kind of preface, is entirely different from the usual fashion show narrative. We are witnessing an event at an amusement park or village fair in which Jeremy Scott (the creative director of the Moschino fashion house) is walking with a bag of popcorn in his hand. This popularizing context is extraordinary: the guests of great fashion brands are mostly VIPs who do not come to the show with popcorn bags but with invitation cards, and they are all well-dressed and adequately prepared, leaving their expensive villas and arriving at an exceptional, dedicated space of the fashion show.



Source: Good Morning Vogue

Picture 2. *Moschino's puppet theatre and Jeremy Scott in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

In this alternative story, Jeremy Scott, with popcorn in his hand, is faced with a strange marionette theatre at the fair. At this moment, the theatre is only a tiny box (it will expand to a human size shortly); it has a puppet mannequin, a marionette figure of Scott, and a woman wearing black and gold leisure dress.

The little marionette-Scott addresses the life-size Scott by saying, "Hey, You!" Upon this gesture, the little puppet becomes anthropomorphic; it is transformed magically into a real, living human being, similar to the uncanny, "unheimlich" (Freud 1955: 217–252) image of the Olympia doll. Scott's puppets create uncertainty through initiating a dialogue with the real person, as "the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or a fantastic one of his creation" (Freud 1955: 230). Jeremy Scott's answer to the deconstructive uncertainty is a real surprise: "Who? Me?" "You!" – responds the marionette – "Come here to help me, zip this dress." At this point, a strange, controversial game of personification starts to unfold. The puppet becomes a living being after being addressed. Moreover, with the changes of the social relations, Scott (the creator of the puppet-show-styled fashion show) is turned into a serviceman, a dresser in the puppet world of the fashion performance. The tiny puppet takes over his directorial power, the aesthetical-ideological power of the designer, as it orders Scott to zip the dress on the puppet-mannequin. The real Jeremy Scott is treated as a simple passer-by and is not addressed as Moschino's designer but as a "flâneur" who has accidentally bumped into the fashion show.

The label of the Moschino T-shirt on the puppet is also strange and quite narcissistic: "I don't speak Italian, but I do speak Moschino." The text on the dress of the fashion show puppet refers to the American-born director of an Italian fashion house.

Source: Style Rave.com

Picture 3. *Scott marionette wearing "I don't speak Italian, but I speak Moschino" label T-shirt in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

Scott addresses Scott. Using de Man's irony concept, this is an expressive start. The "real" Scott asks: "Are you guys here to put on a show?" The marionette Scott answers: "Of course, dear boy! What does it look like?" Indeed, this question is familiar to us from Paul de Man's *Semiology and Rhetoric* – this is a real "Archie Bunker situation" (de Man 1979a: 8). The fictional marionette puppet refers to the

reality of the events, while the real Scott understands it like fiction – "the same grammatical pattern engenders two meanings that are mutually exclusive: the literal meaning asks for the concept (difference) whose existence is denied by the figurative meaning" (de Man 1979a: 8). And, according to the presentation, "the confusion can only be cleared up by the intervention of an extra-textual intention" (de Man 1979a: 10), so as outsiders we have to decide what really cannot be decided, i.e. who is real, who is fictional. Of course, the "real" Jeremy of the filmic presentation does not perceive the rhetorical structure of the question and continues: "Wow! I just love (a) puppet show!" The marionette is hurt and growls: "This isn't a puppet show. This is a fashion show!" The unpleasant situation and the disapproving sight of the puppet make the "real" Scott apologize: "I am sorry. I didn't mean to offend you." This is like the situation in Kleist's *Boy of Thorn*,[7] in which Mr K. recounts how the grace and the vanity of the boy were injured by his comment "You were probably seeing ghosts" (Kleist 1972: 65). In this dialogue, the double meaning of the word "show" (puppet show and fashion show) is taken into a game, and the puppet becomes ghostly. Are we watching a fashion or a puppet show? The question is rhetorical and depends on the persuasion effect on readers, but its importance really affects the history of fashion performances and significantly influences the performativity of fashion shows. The pandemic situation transforms the possibility of contact of bodies and inserts a mediatory change into the former framework of the catwalk show: using the short film as a medium, the two different types of performative acts are opposed to each other. The puppet show is also performative; it has its own rules that differ from the laws of the fashion show. Here, in this ironic situation, the two kinds of performativity are confronted with each other, and their opposite features are manifested.

But what is performativity, and how does it become per(ver)formative due to a deconstructive transformation by the pandemic situation in fashion performance? Fashion shows are always performative in the acceptance of modern and postmodern theories (Austin 1962). A precise set of authenticating rules always operates around relevant performative events. The fashion show is always performative; it does not simply show some clothes (as a shop window does) but draws the clothes into a specific, defined runway narrative.

In contrast to such grammatically regular "happy performatives", we constantly face unruly formats. Austin pointed out that in some cases "something *goes wrong*, and the act – marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening, or whatnot – is therefore at least to some extent a failure (…) the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general unhappy (…)" (Austin 1962: 14). According to the author, the things that can be and that go wrong are "infelicities" (*idem*). Austin groups among

7 The *Boy of Thorn* is a Greco-Roman Hellenistic sculpture representing a sitting boy as he pulls a thorn out of his leg. In Kleist's essay, the view of this harmonious image is damaged by the teacher of the young man who tried to identify with the statue.

these "infelicities" cases where "a performative utterance will, for example, be in a *peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage" (Austin 1962: 22).

Derrida used a specific postcard to illustrate the performative deadlock. The picture shows Plato and Socrates as the latter writes and the former dictates. This situation radically suspends the original principle, the ancient, original performative of the history of philosophy. Derrida's comment says that:

> Here is the master of the *perverformative*, he writes to you: it is indeed me, here is my signature, you will be able to recognize it, it is authentic, and to be more certain, it comes in the first place, above left, I the undersigned, and below right: let the beginning of this letter be for you simultaneously the symbol that it is indeed from me. This breakdown in the subjective moment of the performative always disrupts the constative, assertive, grammatical clarity. It builds into the phenomenon a fracture that thus becomes an event of destructive uncertainty. (Derrida 1987:136)

The infelicity, the "perverformative" is understood by Derrida as the fundamental, essential nature (a kind of unavoidable perversion) of the performative, a character of human communication. What happens in the Moschino show is that the rules of the fashion show are radically broken, and the conventions of the fashion performance are deconstructed. Performativity is transformed into the activity of per(ver)formativity. In Moschino's performance, the marionette puppet creates a "perverse" situation since the presented garments are worn mainly by real human beings. The perverformative character is a critical structure in the deconstructive understanding of performativity.

In the Moschino 2021 Spring/Summer Collection, the designer, Jeremy Scott, transformed the mannequins and the viewers into marionettes. Fashion critics Anna Wintour and Anna Dello Russo also appear as marionettes in this incredible, distorted situation. With a self-ironic gesture, all of us, the viewers, can look at ourselves as puppets of the pandemic situation. Because of the restrictions due to the pandemic, it was not possible to organize the fashion week in many countries in the presence of an audience, but, seemingly, this encouraged Scott to be creative.

In the fashion show, marionette puppets substituted living bodies, and the designer created a complex system of objective references through them, mixed with fictional images. In his essay (which was written about Kleist's theatre), Paul de Man shows that in Kleist's study theatrical situations (e.g. the exchange of looks and dance) are mechanical. According to de Man, this kind of rhetorical operation works by mutually excluding cognitive and performative dimensions, putting all this in contrast with an ideological understanding of aesthetics that was created in romanticism (in the romantic theory of the aesthetics by Schiller). In Moschino's marionette fashion show, the aesthetics of the traditional, formalized

fashion performance (e.g. the presence of bodies, which was the privilege of some people previously), staged aestheticism, symbolism (namely, presentation as a kind of internal sense and beauty) are damaged, broken down at every step. If a real model were to walk in a Moschino's dress, we would take her/him as an aesthetic message. Everyone could see the beautiful garments on beautiful people, creating a complex message of beautiful bodies and objects. The garments worn by the puppets generate an essentially different impression.

Fashion researcher Ginger Gregg Duggan (2001: 243–270) wrote about the development of fashion performance and described its categories.[8] However, her examples are unreliable because only the staged human bodies are seen as beautiful, and only their presence is referred to by her in this kind of fashion performance. The total disappearance of bodies (that of the models and the viewers) and the uncanny movement of the marionette puppet stage a perverse and distorted situation. This is the disappearance/removal of human nature attempted before the COVID-19 period (e.g. Dolce & Gabbana's drone show in 2018). How can the tautology of the idea be solved, i.e. the one that was cited from Schiller by de Man: "art is, in fact, what defines humanity in the broadest sense. Mankind, in the last analysis, is human only by ways of art" (de Man 1984: 132). The question is what kind of human nature is presented in a piece of art like Moschino's puppet fashion show. What comes to light is not a romantic essence of life but a deconstructive, puppet-like machinery, something that is hidden deep inside us.

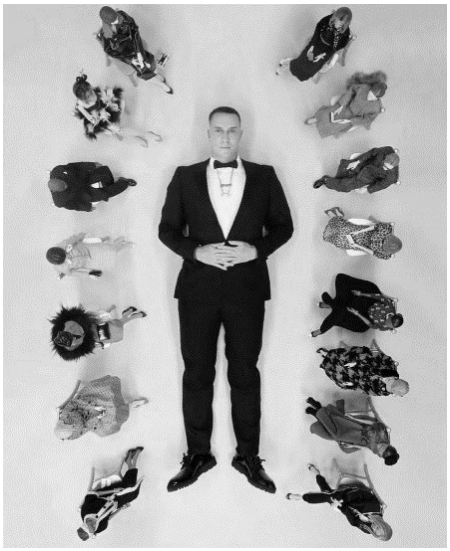
A kind of undecidedness also characterizes the course of events. The continuously present specular but disruptive relationship between the living human body and the mechanical puppet defines the whole fashion show, a ghostly uncertainty in the show. Scott took photos of the garments on lifelike, living mannequins too, possibly before the fashion show by the puppets, which showed the opposite end of this specularity. But in de Man's words: "The specular structure has been displaced but not overcome" (de Man 1973: 69).

A kind of death sign, an anamorphic message is also present in the press photos that were taken of the collection: the living Scott is lying as a dead person, as a puppet himself among the inanimate puppets. Puppet quality is essentially a loss: the permanent danger of lifelessness. The photo taken of this situation (puppets sitting around and mourning the dead Scott) creates the personification and transformation of the puppet into a living being. This clearly "evokes the latent threat that inhabits prosopopeia, namely that by making the dead speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living is struck dumb, frozen in their own death" (de Man 1973: 71). While the puppet is personified, the real model is shifted into a puppet existence at the power of the mirroring image pair.

8 These categories are the following: spectacle, substance, science, structure, statement.

Source: Kendam.com

Picture 4. *Living, "real" mannequins in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*



Source: Style Rave.com

Picture 5. *Puppets sitting around Jeremy Scott in Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

Performative Becomes Per(ver)formative: Doll Bodies, Marionette Motion, and the Absence of the Human Body

In Schiller's description of dance as absolute art (cited in de Man's essay), the essential is the set of formal constructive movements (Schiller 1967) in the background of a piece of art. Similar to dance, this formal constructiveness of the fashion show is created by the bodies and movements of mannequins in a fixed space (catwalk) that has been the primary and required convention since Charles Frederick Worth, who argued that fashion is connected with a social event: its first scene was Worth's saloon (Vinken 2005). De Man's essay on Kleist deconstructs Schiller's position, pointing to the constant collapse of formal constructiveness that creates "beauty", aesthetics. Here, in the case of Moschino, the conventions of the show are decomposed, and the basic principles of the performativity of the fashion show are denied.

Source: Style Rave.com

Picture 6. *Fashion critics as marionettes, Moschino Spring/Summer 2021*

Besides the fact that no living bodies participate in the show, several other features are brought in, in a kind of deconstructive movement. The marionette puppets do not have mobile faces (except the Jeremy puppet, which speaks at the beginning of the show). As a result, affects cannot be expressed; we only see stern, sculpture-like faces. Of course, a "poker face" was traditionally required from living models on the catwalk, but a deconstructive gesture counterpoints these expressionless faces. All of them are familiar to us in the puppet audience: the designer Jeremy Scott, the editor of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour, fashion critic Anna Dello Russo, Nina Garcia from *Elle Magazine*, also including Edward Enninful from *British Vogue*, Angelica Cheung from *Chinese Vogue*, and Vanessa Friedman from *New York Times*. The faces of the mannequins are familiar too: they are the favourite mannequins of Jeremy Scott. As an addition to the list of painted faces, the designer's painted portrait is placed on the wall in the catwalk space of the marionette performance. This face is a simultaneous *de-facement* (de Man 1979b)

act. The face that is also well known from the photos, as a rigid puppet face refers to and removes the living face simultaneously.

The puppets were made by the Jim Henson's Creature Shop (known for its special effects work in Hollywood, e.g. *The Muppets*). The motion of the marionettes is also an exciting aspect of the fashion show. Paul de Man's remarks about the Kleist marionette theatre seem to be valid here too:

> The puppets have no motion by themselves but only in relation to the motions of the puppeteer, to whom a system of lines and threads connects them. All their aesthetic charm stems from the transformations undergone by the linear motion of the puppeteer as it becomes a dazzling display of curves and arabesques. By itself, the motion is devoid of any aesthetic interest or effect. (de Man 1984: 274)

The original context and rules of traditional fashion shows do not provide enough space for the free movement of the model bodies, and the same happens in the case of marionettes. The "affect" is missing from the puppets here and the marionettes of Kleist. The designer notes in an interview given to *Vogue*: "It's not the same energy that a human gives. So I wanted to make sure that it just always had a vibration […] and I do long to work with models again because they are much less futsie when you are trying to get a very beautiful walk out of them."[9] The most prominent difference in the motion between the puppets and the models in flesh and blood is that the legs of the puppets are not connected to the ground. They are suspended by a cord, and their motion is not excessively harmonic. In his essay, Kleist notes the opposite: there is not a more perfect and harmonic motion than the groundless and floating movement of the marionettes. But, certainly, Paul de Man disagrees with this: "Balanced motion … Is the metaphor of a centre of gravity" (de Man 1984: 274), and de Man also points out the contradiction of the words "weighing" and "antigravity" in Kleist's text.

Jeremy Scott's marionette performance is moving somewhere on the border of the serious and the playful in which the performativity of the traditional fashion show is changed into a Derridean perverformativity (Derrida 1987), into a *pervert performative event*. The female body becomes a fetish object: a puppet. Jeremy Scott refers to the duality of the playfulness and the reality, or the serious and the unserious in *Vogue*: "I transport everyone to another place, where we don't think about these problems [he means the pandemic situation], where we don't think about these heavy things…"[10] Thus, the marionette show and/or the fashion show escapes from the sombreness of the pandemic situation: perhaps the fairy context at the beginning of the fashion show also refers to this fact. On the other

9 https://tinyurl.com/3d35ta9e (last access: 05.10.2022).
10 https://tinyurl.com/3d35ta9e (last access: 05.10.2022).

hand, the garment presented on the marionette puppets cannot be taken seriously, as they would not elicit a "must have" feeling in potential consumers. Just think of the favourite Barbie garments from our childhood: we would not wear them; a garment presented on a living body is much more suitable to stimulate anyone for consumption.[11] An ironic gesture must be noted here: Moschino began to sell not only the collection presented on puppets but even the pictures of the marionettes shown on ordinary T-shirts (the price is over 500 dollars). The photos of the pandemic show are transcribed in this deconstructive way into the materiality of the dress. Another exciting aspect is that Jeremy Scott took photos of the marionette puppets as if they were talking to one another backstage or just trying on the garments.

Source: Printamps.com

Picture 7. *Moschino T-shirt from Moschino's Spring/Summer 2021 collection*

The space of the show is called a catwalk, where mannequins walk. Another deconstructive gesture is that the puppets are not connected to the ground; their motion is ethereal, which differs considerably from human movement. As Kleist remarks: Puppets, like elves, need the floor only to skim it (Kleist 1972: 64).

It is essential to think about the defining mode of expression of the Moschino fashion show and how referentiality and figurativity work. The usual fashion show is dominantly referential: it wants to show clothes. The most referential is the shop window of the fashion house; the fashion show is the next step: it is

11 In 2022, Balmain will be, of course, challenging this when it launches its own miniature Barbie collection (Balmain x Barbie). The 50-piece, capsule collection (both in NFT version) is genderless – it is available from 14 January. Is it perhaps thanks to the influence of the Moschino fashion house?

a performative set with the rules of the usual fashion shows. But the Moschino show goes further than that; the reference (for example, Scott's look or the photos of the mannequins) is interspersed with a fictional, figurative presentation. The mannequins present themselves, and thus the clothes they wear, as figurative content. However, despite their anthropomorphic nature, the mannequins are not symbolic but allegorical; they come into existence as a kind of "prosthesis", and through them the tiny clothes they present are also linked to an allegorical frame of temporal nature. The symbolic holds the promise of expressing and referencing intimacy; the allegorical instead seeks things, objects, and metonymies for the broad experience of its message. Such metonymic elements are, for example, the recognizable characters in the audience, who are the significant twists in the world machine that can be marked with fashion. It is true that "the allegorical form appears purely mechanical, an abstraction whose original meaning is even more devoid of substance" (de Man 1983: 191–192). The audience is not symbolic but serves to add another, allegorical system of meaning to the given fashion show.

An even more critical basic rhetorical strategy is the ironic schema of the fashion show. It is not only that everywhere we see a strange, uncanny play on self-irony (like Scott munching popcorn or the ironic dialogue between the two kinds of Scott – real and puppet), but the fashion show itself is built on an ironic, destructive structure. The essence of irony is the doubleness, that is, "the moment that separates reflective activity from the activity of the man who is the prisoner of everyday life" (de Man 1983: 37). "Irony is unrelieved *vertige*, dizziness to the point of madness", writes Paul de Man (de Man 1983: 215). The irony is a duplication or, more precisely, a chaos of the simultaneous possibility of two worlds, where "the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous, involving an extraneous principle that determines the point and the manner at and in which the relationship is articulated" (de Man 1983: 209). At the heart of irony is this doubling (de Man quotes Baudelaire's concept of *dédoublement* (1983: 212)), which "sets apart a reflective activity, such as that of the philosopher, from the activity of the ordinary self caught in everyday concerns" (de Man 1983: 212). This is what Scott indicates in his interview about the background of the fashion show, that his aim was to create a whimsical environment and transport it out on whatever is going on that day. The fashion show is built on parallel, superimposed layers of space and time. The first is the appearance of the real Scott, with his ironic popcorn and a very small marionette, but one that can speak. The second layer is the series of larger marionettes, the fashion show itself. At the end of this, as usual for standard fashion shows, the Scott marionette appears on the runway as the designer. Here, another ironic layer is signalled: on the T-shirt of the Scott puppet, there is the following inscription: "I don't speak Italian but I do speak Moschino."

Fashion References and Intertextual Games

Some interesting, deconstructive, intertextual games are built into the performance that can be seen easily. The cutting, the black label, and the type of the letters on the T-shirt (*I don't speak Italian but I do speak Moschino.*) recall the meeting of Katherine Hamnett and Margaret Thatcher in 1984. As it is well known, Hamnett wore an activist T-shirt (with an anti-nuclear message) at a reception with Thatcher, and the dress stirred up much controversy at the event (Hamnett is a crucial figure in the activist movement.). Indeed, this is not the only parallel in the history of fashion integrated into a game by the white T-shirt: the meme collection of Viktor & Rolf from 2019 also carries provocative messages at the MET Gala.

There is no lack of allusions that break the performativity of the performance: the marionettes could be regarded as allusions to Nina and Robert Ricci's fashion exhibition from 1945, Theatre de la Mode, which was first held in the Louvre after World War II. The exhibition consisted of 237 dolls wearing unique pieces of haute couture. The collection, in the spirit of the "New Look" mentality, wanted to show that fashion can be reborn despite the "shortage of materials". Despite the material and cultural waste caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the fashion industry is in a similar process of deconstructive rebirth today.

The Moschino fashion show is not only an exciting and vital moment of the human, individual-personal and social changes of the COVID pandemic but also an example of a new way of representation called in theatre aesthetics a performative turn. The fashion show breaks traditional fashion-performative rules and creates a kind of "perverse" performativity, both in form and content, in a destructive, deconstructive way. A vital element of this is that puppets appear instead of living mannequins and that the puppets are even incorporated into the living world. In contrast, the living (for example, Scott's real person) are sucked into the medium of the puppet's existence. An endless ironic play permeates the presentation, making us uncertain not only of the perceptibility of fashion but also of the reality of our existence.

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 113–130

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0006

Liquid Wardrobes and Sensing: A Phenomenological Approach to Digital Perfume Communities

Péter VIRGINÁS
Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
p.virginas@ispmn.gov.ro

Abstract. The fact that perfumes have been regarded as enhancing one's appearance opens up questions about knowing and wearing fragrances. The connections between fragrances and fashion are being reviewed first according to the notion of embodiment as applied to the understanding of clothing fashion (Entwistle 2000, 2015); then, the lens of "mediatization", as applied by Rocamora (2017) to grasp the contemporary entanglement of fashion and digital media, further serves to turn to digital perfume communities. These constitute an essential resource to the extent that they share experiences while producing data about wearing and collecting fragrances. By tracing the recent insurgence of perfume criticism and by mapping certain techniques of entering into relation with fragrances through community members' perfume reviews as well, the study argues that their idiosyncratic and often artistic language is countering the impersonal language of perfume advertising; ultimately, the study suggests unravelling perfume consumption patterns via an aesthetics of attention.

Keywords: perfume connoisseurs, smelling, sense, aesthetics, digital community

Introduction

Smell is the olfactory sense that acts invisibly among bodies of various kind; in physiological terms, it acts like an inward muscle, while given the proximity of smell receptors to those belonging to taste, we may speculate that anything that has a taste has also a smell. As such, in the case of both senses, connections to the limbic system have been found accountable for the triggering of memories. The subjective experience of smelling becomes prevalent and may even appear as having explanatory potential in conjunction with matters of taste once fragrances or perfumes come to mind. In what follows, the notion of taste will

recall either the palate or nutrition only in terms of scents that feature so-called food notes in their olfactory pyramids. As the sense of smell enables experiences which widen the realm of the olfactory, using fragrances have been linked to an enhancement of the senses; as such, aesthetical concerns and fashion discourses need to be acknowledged at once. First, we should remind ourselves of the explicit connection between fragrance use and fashionable clothing, an aspect made evident by social history (Corbin 1986). Subsequent difficulties arise to the extent that fashion phenomena now can be interpreted in a variety of ways (for a more recent overview of various fashion notions, see, for ex., Bruggeman 2014). Therefore, I propose a shortcut that will lead to my argument and eventually bring fashion theory into debate.

The complexities underlying the creation of perfumes, but even more so the smells, by virtue of their intimacy, call for a close reading-type of practice. Once the privilege of critics to decipher or translate aesthetic sensibilities, idiosyncrasies, and the functionality of the digital culture now make for a plethora of information created and spread about perfumes. Reviews (either anonymous or signed) as well as forum chats about perfumes as objects outline an enlarged phenomenology in terms of perceptions of human bodies, their ways of acting and relating to each other. The notion of wardrobe, or the personal collection of one's clothing items enables different facets of oneself or marks an extension intertwined with a distribution of personhood (Woodward 2007: 18); the parallel holds to the extent that inquiry should regard the contents of perfume wardrobes as indispensable.[1] However, in what follows, the thread of the analysis will gradually unfold from the material aspects and turn to the immateriality of concerning sensual experiences. By doing so, not only the so far under-analysed aspect of fragrances as merely completing looks would be reconsidered, but eventually an argument is being proposed for unravelling perfume consumption patterns as making sense via an aesthetics of attention.

Fragrance and Fashion

As noted above, historical perspectives have extensively dealt with smells and body odours, as well as with the related function(ality) of fragrances in terms of adornment. Needless to say that, to a significant extent, when applied to human bodies in various concentrations (as cologne waters, eau de toilettes, eau de perfume, perfume extracts, and oils), fragrances have been intertwined with

1 While I do not dismiss matters of perfume collection as unworthy of research, the attribute "liquid" used in the title (both in the literal and figurative sense) alludes to the necessity for zooming-out of the lenses in order to grasp connections with fashion and turn the focus onto the experiential.

glamourous, fashionable objects (i.e. clothing and similar), and appearance ever since (see Corbin 1986, Beaulieu 2013). In parallel, from the point of view of fashion studies, the widely acknowledged theoretical benchmark has emphasized the aspect of signification via codes and signs: specifically, both tangible and intangible objects may have been expressing a fashion sense while being already part of the fashion industry or progressively incorporated by the latter (to be observed, "fashion industry" has been the operational term from (both) a structuralist and cultural studies approach; see Bruggeman 2014). Fashion draws on the novelty aspect with a notion of change marking either the incorporation and/or dismissal of something as being in or out of fashion.

Moreover, it implies the *wearing* of clothing designed as such, but in an enlarged sense it depends on being "displayed" in retail stores, magazines, or digital media, meaning that fashion is visually communicated. Thus, with regard to garments, fashion emerges through wearing/display (both physically and digitally); it is visually effected. In my view, this particular aspect needs to be noted when looking at (dis)similarities in connection with the proximate field of perfumery. We may observe an emphasis on the visual components also in the case of perfumery, namely the perfume bottles as well as the corresponding advertisements that act as, indeed, signifiers. Then, if we take into consideration either the recipients carrying the liquids or the connected imagery, fragrances or perfumes are very much representational.

Nonetheless, a closer look may reveal a gap, a hiatus, or a break in the circuit, as the visual is actually relegated to the domain of packaging. In its place, the olfactory experience is that which underpins contextually changing meanings of fashion(ability), even if being in harmony or in contrast with appearance will be ultimately sought after. That attractive looks coupled with great smell should be overwhelming reveals a common-sense inference. The complementary functionality of perfumes reflects the dominant fashion discourse, as it is presented in magazines, boutiques/retail stores. In other words, a person's appearance has different components (not just clothing items but also hairstyle, footwear, and so on), each entering into relationship with or bearing the marks of current or past fashion trends. In particular, given the proximity of fashion objects (clothes, garments) and the abovementioned bodily intimacy conveyed by or through smell molecules, the understanding of fashion as a "situated bodily practice" (Entwistle 2000, 2015) may serve as a valid starting point to grasp perfume wearing.

To be fair, the complementary relationship between perfumes and outfits has evolved so as to appear straightforward, as one may link, for ex., so-called leather fragrances with leather outfits to be worn in colder seasons or lighter, citrusy fragrances to be worn with warm-weather clothes. A more ubiquitous argument concerns fragrance classification according to the evaporation rate of smell molecules correlated with weather temperature and body heat (i.e. heavier

fragrances to persist in cold weather or to be worn during the cold seasons, and lighter ones suitable to wear in warm(er) weather and hot climates). And we may also encounter a "morphing aspect" with one's physical body, and so fragrances are conferred a second-skin functionality, which is albeit different from the second-skin feature talked about with regard to clothing.[2] If anything, this provides claim to the synesthetic nature of human sense.

On the one hand, leading fashion designer houses have capitalized on this aspect early on (see the textbook example of Chanel by being the first fashion designer house to introduce perfumes), so today virtually any fashion clothing company has a scent line as well. Notwithstanding global inequalities, the seductive power of the likes of Chanel or Dior may lie in the fact that their cosmetic products are more accessible to mass consumers than their fashion clothing collections.[3] While such a pull may be (dis)comforting, I find that fragrance enthusiasts also endorse the slightly differing logic of perfume consumption. Accordingly, craftsmanship or excellent perfume creation is recognized as being different from fashion design practice, and, by extension, it has less to do with fashion designer houses or brands or with the luxury garments those may offer. A closer look at creative processes may encounter a few notable exceptions, as the case of certain iconic, male-oriented perfumes created out of a synergy between perfume creators and fashion designers; before establishing his own brand, the activity of Tom Ford first at Yves Saint Laurent and then at Gucci or the creation of *Dior Homme* fragrance by Olivier Polge involving Hedi Slimane make well-versed arguments in this regard (such examples are rather the exception than the rule, and they might be useful for analysing other aspects, for ex., gender issues at different scales).

Therefore, on the other hand, the connection between fragrances and fashion clothing items appears arbitrary, especially from the perspective of fragrance literacy. The enlarged view on the wide pool of the fragrances often means having a different time scale, so preferences may go beyond mass-market options, towards higher-priced vintage perfumes or towards equally or even more highly-priced niche perfumes (whose creators do not offer other types of luxury fashion items). To the extent that owning and/or wearing fashion items betrays conspicuous consumption in a Simmelian sense, perfumes are also ambiguous. At the outset, spaces of display or acquaintance with perfumes / the initial consumption thereof appear superimposed onto department stores (what is more, large perfume chain

2 Although this perspective has been constantly refined through a lens onto the embodied experience of wearing clothes, it appears as a commonly accepted starting point in many theoretical discussions of fashion phenomena; though media and cultural theorist Giuliana Bruno is not credited for introducing the notion of "second skin", she gives a straightforward description as it applies to clothing as fashion (Bruno 2008: 147).

3 Investigating the relationship between the clothing and perfume lines of leading fashion designer houses should be, however, the subject of another inquiry.

stores now have their niche perfume sections, and strictly "niche" perfume boutiques have also found their place nearby). However, perfumes as collectible stuff, as kept in tangible glass objects are confined to the sanctuary of home. Though the liquids become invisible following the act of spraying oneself, the purposefulness of the act entails a need or demand to recognize perfumes as having exquisite value. This aspect, together with the previously mentioned "second-skin" feature belies a kind of value transference, thereby designating the route towards perfecting one's appearance. Certainly, what is in or out of fashion becomes, then, personal, or a self-aestheticizing project: it is highly influenced by perfume consumption habits, which range from well-informed, self-conscious manner to less reflective ways (identified as visceral sense by some).

Since the present study envisages a collective context where perfumes are assigned the main role, a further aspect to be taken into consideration concerns trends of smell as having their own fashionability. Accordingly, given the scales of dynamics and constraints, we can refer to both specific perfumes as end-products and certain smell molecules that come to be regarded as contemporary, meaning here, for the sake of brevity, being in fashion (a thorough investigation in this regard should inquire into fragrance chemistry and the relevant economic actors). Whatever conceptual means are salvaged or at disposal to convey meaningful sense for the olfactory, the notion of the contemporary may be contrasted with the datedness of either fragrances and/or certain smell notes. In other words, that certain perfume smells are regarded as either "contemporary" or dated is obviously subject to interpretation.[4] Similarities with fashion design practice occur, but only to the extent that we draw an analogy between perfume accords and basic elements of gendered attires.[5] While the latter are reworked, tweaked twice a year, the creation of successful perfumes may (and usually) take up more time; and, in the case of successful fragrances, "fashionability" is certainly longer than one season (even if shelf life is fixed to 3 years). Here I would mention a gendered sub-aspect that appears to synchronize perfumes and fashion garments: menswear fashion is considered as slowly evolving and not so prone to change (as opposed to womenswear).[6] This may correlate with my observation that many male perfume enthusiasts are into vintage perfumes, so vintage perfumery may be either a starting point or an endpoint of the "fragrance journey", as it is voiced affectionately by many. However, I would not venture so far as to generalize by

4 For ex., see agarwood (oud), then rose and oud combo, or specific notes like coffee, incense, or artificial new smell molecules like ambroxan, which do not have historical or real-world material resemblances.

5 However, in the case of fashion design, the cuts, shapes, materials, motifs, etc. are presented as ideas to be translated into garments for the next season; thus, fashion is more like a provider of "raw material" for what eventually will be worn in everyday life (Entwistle 2015: 118).

6 *Why Tom Ford Puts the Logo at the Tip* – interview with Tom Ford by Rachel Tashjian https://tinyurl.com/y2jt2xrd (last access: 05.11.2022).

crediting an ancestral male attitude unwilling to accept nuanced changes; rather there is a sense of "intergenerational growth" (Robertson 2004) that appears to be guilty of the spikes of interest and praise in the vintage market and relevant for niche as well (to the extent that the latter reworks perfume trends from the past); it strikes me as more valid argument than, say, nostalgia.

Finally, a significant differentiating aspect acts like a lower threshold of admission in the case of perfumes (as opposed to interest in other types of fashion items to be worn). Assuming one is not shy to test perfumes means engaging in thorough and systematic investigation of the perfumes offered by boutiques or retail stores at disposal. Such a strategy is different from a rushed moment of buying, and, by doing so, one can arguably gain a fuller sense of the desired object as opposed to putting on any number of garments/dresses in the fitting room. However, as I hinted at, this aspect reflects a difference in degree only, as the ultimate goal is, in case of being satisfied with the scent sample, still about entering into possession of the object. Thus, by taking note of technicalities (for ex.: does spraying on clothes affects one's bodily appearance?), the question whether perfumes are completing looks/appearance should be reformulated by turning to wearers' subjective accounts. In what follows, I will focus mainly on the multi-faceted experience of *wearing* in the sense that it serves (albeit not exclusively) as the third angle of the imaginary triangle, or the dot connecting garments of fashion and perfumes.

Perfume Media

The point of departure for my analysis has been defined by my perspective anchored in the present. Therefore, a positive consideration of the ever-expanding perfume industry (including the proliferating number of various fragrance-making companies, trained perfumers, and consumption on a planetary scale), i.e. as enabling diversity, as well as its "taste cultures" need to be acknowledged both via *and* in connection with the digital realm. Particularly, my starting point has been that any diversity in terms of consumption practices could be grasped by the countless ways of how people relate to fragrances. Thus, while popular labels like "perfumista", "fragbro", or "fragheads" suggest the degrees of engagement (with such labels being used increasingly without negative connotations), the perspective of viewing consumption communities through the lens of mediatization as proposed by fashion researcher Rocamora (2017) lays claim to a somewhat close connection or overlapping with the fashion industry.

The contemporary entanglement of fashion and digital media is useful to sketch an overview of perfume media. While most books on perfumes take historical perspectives on the subject, I think of perfume media in terms of digital media

environments that create, publish, and/or update perfume-related content – from various YouTube perfume reviewers (most having been assigned the status of influencers) and other social media environments (mainly on Instagram but also Facebook and Tumblr). Given, however, the reliance of those on the visibility or the visual, as well as an exploitation of the affordances of the specific form of media all those have been using should also include an analysis of the visual content produced as such.[7] In parallel, there has to be also an acknowledgement of the circulation or flow of transindividual affects as not only enabled by contemporary forms of media but actually what the media are about and for (McKenzie 2020). As I understand, the media tools available mean that we are less relying on the reproduction of definite, clear-cut tastes; next to a positively inclined, evolving, ever-mutating, geared towards the future, an overcoding practice (in a Deleuzian manner) needs to be addressed as well. This understanding of the functioning of media is, in my view, necessary to be aware of.

Therefore, I intended to pay attention to perfume-related diversity as it has been reflected in its very own knowledge-generating potential (as briefly mentioned by Beaulieu 2013). So, I looked first at individual blogs that had an emphasis on the textual content. Such blogs or mini-websites and their creators (often professionally trained perfumers with interest in visual arts as well as other creative-artistic practices) appear as nodes of loose networks, and they also command(ed) many individual followers.[8] Some of these blogs may still be active, but many have been outdone by the different magnitudes by which forums or community sites operate. Of particular interest have been the intricacies of endlessly dissecting hard-to-find, no-longer-produced perfumes as well as contemporary ones (in more usual words, those referred to as vintage or semi-vintage and niche perfumery),[9] as they have resulted in "community-generated" content.

7 So, not only would it be difficult to outweigh the significance of the visual, but I cannot see examining such output without paying attention also to the inherent algorithmic regulations. All such aspects call for a different scope and method of analysis; in other words, by dwelling upon the better consumption/purchase suggestions equal better rankings, I have envisaged diminishing gains.

8 Some of the first wave of blogs are extinct (such as ntsperfume.com or raidersofthelostscent.blogspot.com), while others are still functional (like kafkaesqueblog.com). Even the much-cited Turin and Sanchez have been updating their blog until recently (https://www.perfumestheguide.com).

9 The fragrance world is rather straightforward in its classification; accordingly, the labels vintage or semi-vintage have been applied to perfume products marketed during the 20th century and the early 21st century by fashion designer houses and a few traditional, only-perfume-producing houses; several factors (like changing consumer trends coupled with temporary failure to sell) contribute to such products becoming hard-to-find and therefore collectible stuff, i.e. vintage as it applies to other types of, once mass-produced artefacts that have been culturally endowed in hindsight. To be noted, some vintage perfumes also fall in the category of niche, but in most cases niche means a contemporary take on perfumery by perfumers with one-of-a-kind artistic style, complemented with the use of natural raw materials in spite of global scarcity and restrictions.

As I have been engaged in extensive online research, two self-entitled digital perfume encyclopaedias have consistently popped up, namely *basenotes.net* and *fragrantica.com*. I narrowed my focus to *Fragrantica*, since it appeared as more diverse and also because of making content available in several other languages, apart from the global English. (While both are originated in the US, *Fragrantica* has been gaining more traction among users based across Europe; I should also mention that many use both).[10]

When asking what the role of online fragrance communities is, we should reckon that they are obviously influencers of consumption. Moreover, we can loosely map the reasons why and how online fragrance communities are functional; perfumes are considered as ideal objects for community debates given their varied and often subversive compositions in olfactory terms (Herman 2013). Within fragrance communities, we can easily distinguish general aims like searching for a signature scent, building or expanding one's perfume collection by communicating with fellow connoisseurs. The general effect is an enrichment of one's knowledge about the subject, and by being positioned specifically, becoming informed to debate about issues and giving advice for matters related. This aspect, however, is not what makes perfume-connaissance specific, as it merely reflects the intended use of media platforms, i.e. it puts an emphasis on the mediation aspect, or on the way how knowledge is communicated/circulated, and not so much on the knowledge itself (although any knowledge is modelled by such noisy factors as the affordances of a specific interface of communication). Accordingly, the self-aestheticizing features enabled to users have contributed to the specific illusion of bringing face-to-face the breadth of fragrances with the wealth of consumers (whereby members tailor their perfume collections as quasi-public wardrobes and communicate their level of experience).

Such operating conditions of the new-comer perfume houses (i.e. those established towards the end of 20th century or that started to produce perfumes at that time) are now being copied by mainstream designer houses. Therefore, niche as an umbrella term appears as endemic to the perfume industry as the latter developed throughout the 20th century. And, to further complicate the picture, niche has its own mainstream, compared to which perfumers labelled "independent" are considered to be different to the extent that they evade certain regulations set for perfume industry professionals; pushing further limits in terms of perfume-creating concepts, ideas and even more limited distribution/availability, indie perfumery remain inversely proportional to mass appeal.

10 *Fragrantica*.com presents a comprehensive database of perfumes (over 72,000 perfume entries listed, although including different editions of supposedly same formulas) and has a fairly large number of users/members across the continents, with a bigger proportion from the English-speaking countries (over 700,000 registered members with active or online members fluctuating most likely according to working hours in the global North). While its own journal-like main page content is produced by its own perfume-loving editorial staff, they also recruit contributors from among the members (which, if anything, it constitutes a further evidence in support of my own endeavour in the sense that Fragrantica editors have also noticed the writing skills of certain members).

Thus, I have put a focus on user input about fragrance entries where members share written experiences and give their opinion. In other words, the performance of fragrances is voiced or assessed individually, as well as submitted to quantitative analysis according to certain parameters.[11] Tracing back such practices to perfume criticism as having emerged through various informed texts which had been published earlier (see, for ex., Edwards 1996; Turin–Sanchez 2008, 2018) may have had its appeal in terms of writers' practical advices (for ex., training one's nose) and general encouragement or invitation to get acquainted with this field of sensual beauty and precision chemistry. In other words, a specific genre of writing piece, namely reviewing and assessing particular fragrances, has fared well with the affordances of the digital realm. In other words, what interested me was the way in which highly idiosyncratic expressions have been emerging through common parlance but without repeating or reiterating the stereotypical language of perfume marketing; thereby, knowledge-bases created by and for perfume enthusiasts and perfume criticism as practised independently (the inherent consumer aspect aside) cannot be separated neither from each other nor from the heritage line of perfume criticism, as literate consumers took heed of the advice of the so-called first generation of independent perfume critics.

Looking at such a diffuse canon of perfumery by skimming through the reviews, I have occasionally stumbled upon insights that seemed remarkable (a subjective bias, I admit) by way of their style of formulation/expression as well as by individualistic sense that came through, in the sense of "added" quality that both resonated with artistry and pointed to a functional knowledge of a kind.[12] In spite of counterarguments against hand picking and indirect interpretation, an overview of both perfume history and the contemporary conditions makes it rather obvious the prevailing of artistic quality. So, a focus on qualitative aspect appeared useful while I have gathered an initial overview of differences among perfume-evaluating criteria or perspectives (priming various factors in terms of sensory, perfume-historical, quantitative or scaled approaches, and so on). In other words, connection to the intellectual discourse of past and contemporary perfumery has been followed by gathering information about perfumes that have been given steady attention to by the already mentioned first wave of "independent" perfume critics and bloggers (see Turin–Sanchez 2018). The fact that I have been more familiar with perfumes for men has obviously influenced

11 On their turn, these are also indexed by specific notions: the appropriate seasons of wearing, longevity of wear, the "ideal" gender of the wearer of the perfume in question, as well as evaluation of price and quasi-technical variables such as projection, silage. All the previously mentioned amount, eventually, to an immense and constantly growing pile of data on both perfumes and users; thereby, both quantitative and qualitative analyses may be conducted (as of Spring 2022, over 1,200,000 reviews have been listed).

12 A similar observation has been thematized also by a journal report, albeit in the context of leisure time within the pandemic restrictions (see Syme 2021).

my inquiry. A narrowing of the vast subject area or a point of departure has been constituted by paying attention also to users who have been reviewing so-called genderless perfumes; therefore, my investigation was not blind to any gender scale but was not interested in user profiles categorized in terms of gender either.[13] Thus, I have contacted initially a few Fragrantica members who have been reviewing and referring to both vintage and contemporary fragrances (although to varying degrees). The number of reviews posted, together with a certain consistency of reviewers to deal with perfumes in an ongoing manner, has been telling in terms of their engagement with the topic; the number of reviews as well the consistency of the input or postings have been also decisive for my sampling. Subsequently, I have conducted structured e-mail discussions about how they relate to perfumery and fashion, as well as details about reviewing practices. Recommendations of certain reviews and/or reviewers as well as user profiles highlighted by Fragrantica's own editorial staff (one of the respondents has drawn my attention to this feature of the Fragrantica portal) have constituted further criteria for reaching out to subsequent community members.

Perfume Experience and Critics

While perfumes are conveyed in terms that are similar to those concerning (fashion) clothes, we are reminded that "fashion articulates the body, producing discourses on the body" (Entwistle 2000: 4), and so fashion theorist Joanne Entwistle (2000: 10–11) has been calling attention to "…consider dress in everyday life as embodied practice: how dress operates on a phenomenological, moving body and how it is a practice that involves individual actions of attending to the body with the body". Considering this emphasis on the phenomenological, embodied dimensions of wearing clothes, how does it translate to the wearing of perfumes?

13 A slightly different but common path made it clear that the blurring of gender boundaries would be characteristic to a certain extent for lovers of both vintage and niche; here, we should note that a handful of classic perfumes have been increasingly regarded as wearable by the other sex, i.e. feminine perfumes by men and vice versa. In parallel, there has been a growing trend of genderless perfume products that remains characteristic of both niche and the more expensive, exclusive scent lines of the leading fashion designer houses. In most cases, one should not view this phenomenon of consumption as something that eventually applies equally to both sexes; an overview of quantified opinions or user data/input on wearing genderless or "universal" perfumes should suffice. It should be more interesting, however, to disentangle any such unintended causalities/consequences by taking into consideration, besides the gender/culture aspect, a variety of patterns, such as skin chemistry, as well as geographic location and climate (one may wonder, however, about any additional benefits of drawing anthropological maps of perfume usage beyond marketing value or further academic text output). Moreover, emphasizing such an aspect should also entail a recalibration of the research focus in terms of class- and income-related affordances.

The claim of diversity, therefore, will necessarily map onto a knowledge base to be understood as communication and inquiry about fragrances: what to wear on specific occasions but also beyond, specifically in the sense of being able to participate in the fragrance discourse meaningfully. Consequently, what interests me is rather post-phenomenological, since – to the extent that it becomes knowledge – it is recognized as such via multiple *mediations* of phenomenological experiences, especially when we consider it as being coupled also with, for ex., technical or scientific data from the realm of chemistry. It is at once "attending to the body", as Entwistle has suggested, but also different. Significantly, such knowledge is built on "wear time" to the extent that smell molecules have a life span or duration that depends on / varies according to the surfaces those are sprayed upon. Similarly, by making use of the suggestion that the sense of smell may provide a basis for aesthetic critical reflection (Shiner 2020), we may turn to a Friedian conceptual distinction between "objecthood" and "art objects", which in our case may resonate with the ways in which certain perfumes achieve status or are conferred such by fragrance connoisseurs.

Accordingly, some perfumes could be discerned as novelties by bearing a close resemblance to domains where creative output is essential, namely arts and fashion design. In this sense, it has been rather obvious that the common thread of artistic quality could be seen as the defining feature of what has made certain perfumes outstanding during the past decades and up until our day. The same move glued the artistic quality to the perfume creator, or to the artist (Turin 2006; Turin–Sanchez 2008, 2018). However, the defining benchmarks of the aesthetically inflicted reflections appear to be set by the very character of fragrances where the former involves synaesthesia by default. According to the now common insight that senses are intertwined so that making sense of oneself and/or the world should be considered a synesthetic act, in the case of perfumes their inherent synesthetic character is even argued to lend itself to at times elusive subversiveness, which is prone to elevate/dethrone them as the very objects of pop culture (Herman 2013). While this view may not deprive the olfactory experience of perfumes from its classical Kantian undertones (with its components broken down into the distance, spontaneous play and disinterested pleasure of the senses, as it has been reflected by the community members whom I contacted), such contradictory approaches certainly needed balancing for the sake of a feasible inquiry.

On the one hand, there has been a proliferation of perfume connoisseurship ever since the much-referenced perfume criticism of Turin and Sanchez, which can be viewed as propagating an autodidact way of relating to perfumes, or enabling for anyone to voice her or his opinion and argue for a reboot of the discourse about fragrances. On the other hand, the advent of the digital media has enabled/driven most people to create content, or be the content themselves, a fact that still makes place for the amateur vs. professional debate. Nonetheless, an understanding of

what is considered professional appears as fleeting and/or context-dependent; it should be limited neither to the language of marketing nor to the interviews taken from perfume creators. Therefore, I have been doing away with the binary categorization of amateur and professional approaches; moreover, the literary or fictional component triggered in such a highly idiosyncratic and aleatory manner appears to me as a way more professional approach in terms of language use.

Perfume connoisseurship can be grasped as a very individual project (at least so far), and it has been tapping into professional knowledge that goes into perfumery making (i.e. fragrance chemistry) and simultaneously developing a different vernacular approach about perfumery. On its turn, such language should not fall for the seduction of advertising or marketing while maintaining its rather different building blocks, which are to be viewed in terms of the experiential and the comparative dimensions. However, we should also observe that this claim by no means amounts to saying that the *experiences* of perfumes have been irreconcilably different ever since (except for experiencing the new or reformulated versions of vintage perfumes). Such concerns may be simultaneously positioned in a causal chain (which is an argument for perfume history). To sum up, the possibility to reconceptualize and relocate the artistic quality as becoming the proprietary feature/marker of written texts or reviews posted by registered members appeared as being not so much a translation/mirroring of the perfume creator's perfume concept but rather autonomous from any supposedly inherent feature of the perfumes considered as "art objects".

Sensing Bodies and Attention

Going back to the observation of social historian Richard Sennett – according to whom a change is one's outer appearance; starting from the 19th century, it has been equated with a change of the "self" (Sennett 1974 quoted by Bruggeman 2014: 39–40) –, we may note that, apart from (im)perceptible mood changes, it has been implied that the scent someone is wearing/or the body odour that he or she emanates may have such communicative powers as well, if not quite in terms of a self, then at least with regard to one's disposition.

More recently, individual actions or practices in terms of wearing fragrances have been reviewed in depth to the extent of emphasizing so-called cross-modal or intersensory valences related to the perception of both the self and others, as well as the function of fragrances in connection to those, e.g. mood, attraction (cf. Spence 2021). This is a reasoning from a cognitive and social psychological perspective that builds on the recognition that bodily experiences cannot be characterized as being homogenous, but they clearly have aspects linked to the subjective nature of smelling and to how a smell "feels".

As such, communicative situations dependent on first-person and third-person perspectives ultimately reveal an anchoring in the paradigm of "body representations", whereby bodies are to be conceived in terms of both schema (or the capacity to act, in a Spinozan/Deleuzian paradigm) *and* body image. While it is plausible to suggest their overlap in order to make sense (at all), the notion of "body schema" underneath the "body image" appears to guide a departure from the "objecthood" of scents, whereby dissipation or evaporation is ultimately meaningful only if phenomenologically felt. I believe this functionality is the core component of the critique against the representational understanding, or the subtext that invariably lingers when including fragrances in the mainstream fashion discourse (i.e. as *invisibly* completing one's look). Fragrances or perfumes are surely invisible throughout the acts of wearing: not only in the sense that they are not representational in a Barthesian allusion but rather perceptible along different "lines of flight" and therefore in need of interpretative keys.

The abovementioned body schema (which is dependent on the capacity to act) is relevant here as the intertwining of the sensory and the somatic, and which, joined by the cognitive aspect or goal, is – by way of the notion of "embodiment" as performance (as applied by fashion studies, see Entwistle 2000, 2015; Bruggeman 2014) – locked into a sort of performativity that appears valid for each "body" emerging in a fragrant encounter.[14] As such, reminding ourselves that the notion of performativity is clearly indebted to the performative aspect of language itself, we should attend to and disentangle the construct that is the performing bodies in our context.

Thus, when asked about the dynamics between wearing vs owning/collecting fragrances, as well as having knowledge about them, one of the Fragrantica members replied that: "I don't see myself as a collector but a reader, although fragrance isn't really 'read' so much as listened to…" (L. J.).[15] Crediting the writing of perfumer and blogger Victoria Frolova for bringing the Japanese expression of "listening to incense" to perfumers' attention, we may witness a shift of registers, whereby fragrances are not to be read like (spoken) language. You cannot read it, that is, your eyes and/or fingers are not much of use, but it requires a different sense. In a different note, we may remind ourselves of the subsequent parts of Roland Barthes's argument for fashion as a system of signification, or reading fashion as language, where identities and bodies function as signifying surfaces (Bruggeman 2014: 12–44): bodies in our context do have surfaces, and they do signify; the task is, however, to grasp the different terms of signification. To be fair,

14 As stated by one Fragrantica member, "there is an aspect of both perfume and fashion that is performative, and performance is always critically bound to the present" (L. J.).

15 Although the community members use aliases, I have changed their names to preserve their relative anonymity.

perfumery has a very elaborate system of signification of its own (the language input system referred to by Turin (2006) is a case in point).

The "essence" that is contained in the form of liquid is, nevertheless, not identical to it since the liquid acts as a carrier or container of various components to be released as layered (as "tete", "coeur", and "fond") and/or on a finite time scale. As a complementary way of approaching scents, we may have visual cues in terms of advertising as well as packaging where the original bottles or recipients carry design features. And, one may equally argue for the relevance of the tactile, which may be further enhanced through bottle design, shape, its surface, and labelling. Furthermore, we should also mention the proprioceptive sense that is necessitated to either put on a perfume or lend one's hand or another body part of choice to be sprayed or splashed upon, as well as subsequently examining the evolution stages of perfumes. Being, as noted before, a common and idiosyncratic practice, we should also emphasize the differing running order of senses, as for some the passion is not about collecting full bottles (which cannot be used in a lifetime) but the smell itself. This fact then leads to reconsider besides perfume wearing also the phenomenon of collecting fragrances. The extent to which the two aspects may be either uncoupled or differentiated would be, however, the subject of another study.

The visual loses its appeal when perfumes are acquired in smaller quantities: while miniature bottles that still carry the perfume creator design are not a ubiquitous practice, decanted samples or vials as well as "discovery sets" are the way to go. On the one hand, this practice may serve as evidence for the smell to retain its primacy. On the other hand, acquiring perfume samples is cost-effective and is the necessary step if the subjective interpretation/evaluation of smells is both the goal and the denouement. The term "blind buy" is commonly used in fragrance communities although it appears as a rather unfortunate expression or misinterpretation of the warning that one should buy a bottle only after having smelled and worn it. If anything, this aspect reinforces the commodity fetishism as emerging through the visual imagery, as it (mis)places the value onto which is seen, or the container, i.e. the perfume bottle. The different strategy of perfume sampling is obviously beneficial in terms of refining one's olfactory sense by enabling to compare and wear many fragrances in order of hundreds or thousands.

While bearing resemblance to the sampling practice as celebrated by contemporary cultural and art theorists (e.g. Bourriaud 2002), the practice of sampling in our case has various meanings: it may refer to the layering or wearing of different perfumes at one time or, conversely, having a kind of rotational use which does not suppress wear time (via the aforementioned layering) but dilates it, as a kind of "mixtape" approach in the context of which by wearing different perfumes for different periods of the day, or even envisaging durations, different perfumes follow one another so that specific olfactory notes punctuate different

timespans or the passing of time. Needless to say, this aspect could be easily conflated with a person's lifetime as being marked by the use of specific scents, where taking the already mentioned "fragrance journey" from youthful scents to acquired taste becomes a popular metaphor of life experiences. However, I wish to emphasize here the fact that acquaintance with perfumes is very much an issue of (constantly paying) attention, not dissimilar to the fleeting, receding, and coming to the fore instances of awareness or consciousness level. There is an act of "…individuating of ourselves through the act of attention" (McKenzie 2020: 68) but which act, because of the fluidity of its synesthetic object, wants to individuate the object itself.

So, where stimuli and habits or schemas form different concoctions, there emerges an "aesthetics of attention" with its own distinctive "ecology" according to a concept of attention subdivided into alertness, loyalty, projection, and immersion (Citton 2016 quoted by McKenzie 2020: 66–79). While the authors cited seek to deal with the conditions provided by attention economy (in the sense of abundant information and limited capacity of attention), I suggest that by pointing to the "listening phase" as an active engagement of the senses such cognitive endeavours may be viewed as individual reverse-engineering efforts, which also manage, for a brief period of time, the distraction sought by attention economy. Specifically, even one remarkably characteristic feature of the latter – which is attraction – here cannot be conceived in a traditional model of communication anymore (see the sender and receiver couplet) but has many elements that are not individualized but become as such through transitory processes; e.g. the air needed to transport smell molecules, the heat wave needed to lift off molecules from the skin; then, one should take into account even the folded objects like scented clothing pieces (which have also their own individual histories, as from boutique shelves or wardrobes and then put on, etc.); and, ultimately we even re-individualize the scent molecules, as those play an olfactory mimicry on either various natural resources or (semi-)artificial, man-made materials by lending the impression, for varying periods of time, of enveloping the wearer and thus considered as defining/marking human bodies (see, for ex., so-called animalic fragrances). Moreover, in this regard, it is to be observed that many seek fragrances that meld with their perceived body odours (see the second-skin feature mentioned earlier). The variations here are like a box of Pandora – so, instead of dwelling on apparently eternal differences, I would return to the issue of attention whereby, in lieu of the rules set forth by any attention economy standards, the maximum attention is garnered, or remains an effort to be pursued; and, by doing so, the deficiency of information is handled or grasped. Subsequently, the next step is to create/reveal a wealth of data (again, it is debatable as to what reviewers' contributions amount to, generally speaking, in terms of unearthing already existing information about perfumes and their creators

or channelling hitherto inexistent perspectives). In a way, voicing/testing a new language, or even the "mechanic" acts of translating existing information, say, for ex., from French or Italian into the global English, should be considered as (re-) creating practices. Therefore, asking whether these accounts relate to perfume concepts appears as a path to analytic endeavours leading nowhere. Instead, the key moment is to stress the role of aesthetics as attention where alertness in the sense of excitement to smells is either exhausted or brought to the limit of fatigue/ exhaustion: "What a [good] perfume triggers must be sensory and emotional and intellectual and social. The challenge of processing these experiences is exciting because it involves connecting a non-narrative experience like smells to feelings and perceptions experienced as abstractions back to the body…" (L. J.).

Creating a narrative in connection to perfume experiences in the form of reviews is the overall effect; the acts which involve media usage are acts of projection in an inherent manner (for our purpose, we may note acts of the intellect, specifically those of writing and/or reading about perfumes). In other words, if not quite genuine acts of creativity in some cases, these convey self-expressions through reflective practices, whereby "noting down what I smelt has helped me to understand and appreciate the scent better" (as remarked by B. W., another Fragrantica member to whom I spoke). Language then, either written or spoken, appears as the most adequate tool of communication whereby, in our context, a different dimensionality of experience appears – in spite of/or through capturing or referring to fleeting or temporary perfume characteristics: see, for ex., the aura of the wearer, which is not to be confused with the "scent bubble"; the bodily awareness as an olfactory tracing of body movements in space; a heightened sense of body postures, codified between the extremes of work and leisure times, or onto the spectrum thereof. In addition, perfume wearing may bring into focus or give rise to different facets of experience such as verticality in connection with so-called bold, statement perfumes, as well as one's shadow superimposed by the phenomenon of "scent trail".

Thus, in accordance with the typology of attention sketched before, we have an aspect of immersion which is not (and cannot be) a constant, as it alternates with loyalty (i.e. signature scents / favourites) or with the perfume references which serve to "frame one's writing", as stated by another Fragrantica member (H. F.). In a different ordering, a projection of attention is finally needed to give meaning to one's perfume experience, which may then harvest its own digital attention when read or up-/downvoted. Ultimately, apart from the *countable* terms related to the forum profiles of either perfume connoisseurs or fragrance entries, what the senses effectuate may be cast to those in-between spaces as connections to be explored (as proposed by McKenzie 2020: 78–79).[16] Therefore,

16 In this sense, cultural theorists such as Wark Mackenzie argue for the communal, shared feelings that evade being captured by any media form, although such transindividual affects appear to be the ultimate concern of media outlets.

with the qualitative aspects being both the burden and the benefits of their respective lenses and situated perspectives, at least such accounts do not reiterate the importance of one specific skill of attention and are wary of the promise of being served feasts for the senses.

So, paying attention to scents may come as an activation of the senses with the priming of the olfactory; it is a conscious practice that should eventually give rise, in the case of perfumers, to "olfactory consciousness" (as proposed by Edmond Roudnitska, one of the most acclaimed perfumers of the past century; see Roudnitska 1991: 38). Therefore, we may sense the intertwining of the olfactory sense and smells (or the "distribution" of the olfactory dimension in terms of sensing organ and pleasant/unpleasant odours). While the historical perspective has identified a reconfiguration from provoking sensation to receiving it (i.e. towards the (aesthetically) pleasing (see Corbin 1986: 81)), a new shift has been reinstantiated to mark a return to evoking sensation. Not so much a desire to provoke by malodours of past centuries due to lack of personal hygiene, and neither in terms of the skunk or various animalic perfume notes. Conversely, sensations are to be elicited both in place of actual smells (and therefore abstract and subject to imagination) *and* also in parallel with those – precisely because, as the historical argument proceeds, the sweet odours could not be distinguished or defined as opposed to strong ones (ibid.). Therefore, any such distinctions are revealing particular perspectives that, falling back to the material background, appear to multiply tastes depending on affordances and popular consumption patterns. By reviewing the connections between fragrances and fashion, I have turned to the media platforms that perfume enthusiasts use along the vein of the more recent trend of perfume criticism. I have suggested a contemporary take on this popular phenomenon of consumption by drawing on the notion of attention as both conditioned by the contemporary media and being necessary for the acts of synaesthesia.

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 131–154

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0007

The Digital Brand Identity of Fast-Fashion Brand Zara. A Case Study

Gyöngyvér Erika TŐKÉS
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
gyongyvert@ms.sapientia.ro

Abstract. The research presented in this paper examined the structure and consistency of the digital brand identity of the fast-fashion brand Zara. The research was based on the content analysis of Zara's brand page, the website of Zara's owner Inditex, and Zara's Instagram page. The analysis of Zara's digital brand identity was divided into two parts: on the one hand, the communicative aspects of the brand site and the Instagram page were examined to verify the conditions of the digital brand experience, and, on the other hand, the structure and consistency of the brand identity on all three digital platforms were considered. Among the brand identity elements, mission, values, personality, and offers were present on all three digital platforms, while the competence element was mostly absent. This gap calls into question the credibility of the brand identity, which in turn makes it difficult for Zara to become a strong brand. Zara's digital brand identity has proven to be consistent towards customers but incomplete towards employees and other stakeholders.

Keywords: Zara, fast fashion, brand identity, corporate website, brand page, Instagram page

Introduction

Globalization and digital transformation are also affecting the fashion industry, and fashion retailers are adopting specific coping strategies. One of these strategies is the fast-fashion approach, whereby companies adapt both their manufacturing and sales processes to best meet consumer demands (Barnes–Lea-Greenwood 2006, Barnes 2013). An important part of the fast-fashion strategy is the creation and communication of a strong brand in order to meet the increased expectations of a fast-paced and experience-driven consumer (Helal–Ozuem–Lancaster 2018, Mihm 2010).

Zara is a leading fast-fashion brand with a large follower and customer base, especially among young people. A strong brand stands out from its competitors

with its attractive personality and unique features. A brand's credibility is ensured by the consistency between the brand promise and the brand's actions, as well as the consistency of the brand's communication mix. The revolutionary role of the Zara fast-fashion brand in the fashion industry has been the subject of numerous articles (Cortez et al. 2014, Nebahat 2008, Crofton–Dopico 2007), but there is a lack of studies that trace the construction of the Zara brand identity to highlight the values and emotional appeal that enable Zara to stand out in the crowd and attract young fast-fashion consumers.

The aim of this study is to analyse the brand identity characteristics of Zara, based on the content published on the official brand page (www.zara.com), the corporate website of the brand's owner Inditex Group (www.inditex.com), and Zara's Instagram page. The Zara brand identity's analysis sheds light on how Zara wants to be perceived by its stakeholders. Examining Zara's brand identity is challenging for a fast-fashion brand that ranks 45th out of the top 100 brands in the world with the highest brand equity (InterBrand 2022). At the same time, Zara's brand identity communication is considered by many experts and analysts to be unreliable, especially in terms of delivering on its brand promise of sustainability, despite scoring 75th out of 100 on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index[1] in 2021 (Allam et al. 2020, Sajn 2019, Brewer 2019, McNeil–Moore 2015).

The website of the brand owner company (Inditex Group) and the Zara brand page are the official static communication channels of Zara, where the brand owner presents the self-image of the brand from its own point of view (Wheeler 2018, Keller 2013). To analyse the relational aspects of Zara's brand identity towards its consumers, the content of 51 posts published on its Instagram page was considered. Currently, one of the most commonly used social media channels for fashion brand communication is Instagram, which focuses on visual communication and is one of the most popular media platforms for young and digitally savvy consumers of fast-fashion brands (Popović-Šević et al. 2021, Helal et al. 2018, Krepapa et al. 2016, McNeil–Moore 2015, Gamboa–Martins Gonçalves 2014).

The research topics discussed in the study are:

1) the communicative aspects of Zara's brand page and Instagram page;
2) the brand identity elements of Zara displayed on the brand page, Instagram page, and the brand owner's website;
3) the consistency of Zara's digital brand identity, taking into account the brand identities presented through these three digital channels.

1 The Dow Jones Sustainability World Index includes global sustainability leaders identified by Standard and Poor (S&P) Global (a respected company that compiles financial market indices) through the Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA). The index represents the top 10% of the 2,500 largest companies in the S&P Global Broad Market Index based on long-term economic, environmental, and social criteria.

In the first part of this article, we discuss the characteristics of fast fashion and the digital brand management and communication processes specific to fast fashion. Here, we also present the role of brand identity in brand management. In the second part of the article, we summarize the characteristics of Zara's digital brand identity based on the content published on the brand's website, the brand owner's website, and the brand's Instagram page, comparing the construction of brand identities displayed on each digital platform. The paper concludes with a summary of the results.

Theoretical Background

The Development of Fast Fashion

Fashion denotes popularity, be it in products, services, lifestyles, or business sectors. Any fashion, regardless of the length of its survival, will at some point lose popularity, only to be replaced by a new fashion, and then the cycle restarts (Loureiro et al. 2019, Barnes 2013). Traditional fashion brands were created by established fashion leaders, followed by the spread of particular fashion styles and then their disappearance. Over time, it has been a longer process in which fashion retailers have sought to produce products in anticipation of consumer demand and evolving fashion trends. In general, the fashion industry was based on a two-season approach, which resulted in two major collections per year, namely autumn/winter and spring/summer collections (Barnes 2013). As competition in the clothing industry became increasingly fierce, from the 1980s onwards, fashion retailers paid less and less attention to the present needs of their customers and based their business strategies more on future fashion trends (Gupta–Gentry 2018, Bhardwaj–Fairhurst 2010). Fashion retailers shifted from product-driven to customer-driven distribution strategies and placed greater emphasis on brand management. The essence of the customer-driven strategy is to focus on customers' expectations of fashion, with less and less attention paid to the functional utility of apparel products (Gupta–Gentry 2018, Helal et al. 2018). By the turn of the millennium, the overall pace of life had accelerated, and consumers were demanding constant change and increased rhythm in their fashion following (Gupta–Gentry 2018). Fast fashion responded to this consumer expectation (Sajn 2019, Loureiro et al. 2019).

Fast fashion is a business strategy that reduces the lead time of the buying cycle processes and the time it takes to get new fashion products into stores, with the idea of satisfying consumer demand at peak times (Loureiro et al. 2019, Park–Kim 2016, Barnes 2013, McNeil–Moore 2015, Barnes– Lea-Greenwood 2006). Fast fashion imitates the designs of big fashion brands, and then introduces clothing

styles that keep pace with the trend and are quickly updated and sells them to consumers at lower prices (Nurnafia et al. 2021, Chunling 2020, Sajn 2019). In order to meet consumers' demand for novelty, the number of planned seasons and collections increases significantly, resulting in up to 24 collections per year, as in the case of Zara (Sajn 2019). Constantly renewing collections keep consumers' and the public's attention on fast-fashion brands, but this requires continuous brand communication (Rosenblum 2015, Barnes 2013, Christopher et al. 2004). Fast-fashion brands thus combine three elements: rapid response, frequent changes, and fashionable designs at affordable prices (Loureiro et al. 2019).

An unresolved issue with fast fashion is sustainability, which runs counter to the operational logic of fast fashion (Brewer 2019, Csanák 2018). As fashion cycles become faster, some sectors of the fashion industry are adopting increasingly unsustainable production techniques to keep up with demand and increase profit margins (Brewer 2019, McNeil–Moore 2015, Entwistle 2014). If fashion consumption continues to grow, the impacts on the social and ecological environment will also threaten the quality of life of future generations (Gupta–Gentry 2018). Some researchers refer to this phenomenon as the fashion paradox, whereby global economic importance shields the fashion industry from the criticism of its inherent wastefulness, while slowing down the industry-wide movement towards ethical practice and legitimizing the role of unethical fast fashion in the marketplace (Brewer 2019, McNeil–Moore 2015).

Many manufacturers in the fashion industry are trying to change their unsustainable nature, but this can only be achieved in the long term if consumers support sustainable fashion through their purchases (McNeil–Moore 2015). Research has identified a discrepancy between consumers' perceptions of fast-fashion brands' sustainability and their behaviour towards these brands (Harris–Roby–Dibb 2016, Park–Kim 2016, McNeil–Moore 2015, Niinimaki 2010). The steps taken by fast-fashion brands towards sustainability are not always appreciated. As the fast-fashion strategy is at odds with sustainability, the sustainability efforts of these brands are viewed critically by the professional community and the wider public. Fast-fashion brands are often accused of greenwashing or dishonesty, precisely because of the contradiction between the nature of fast fashion and sustainability (Alexa et al. 2021, Allam et al. 2020, Blazquez et al. 2019).

A Review of the Fast-Fashion Brand Zara

Zara is a leading global fast-fashion brand (Popović-Šević et al. 2021, Mihm 2010). The brand is owned by the Spanish-originated Inditex Group, one of the largest fashion retail groups in the world. In addition to Zara, Inditex also distributes the brands Massimo Dutti, Pull&Bear, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, and Zara Home (Inditex brands). Zara successfully replicates the latest global

trends in luxury brands. Zara's designers draw inspiration from major fashion shows, celebrity wear, and street fashion and combine this with the costs that consumers are willing to pay (Chunling 2020). In this way, Zara allows customers to wear fashion clothes that are constantly renewed worldwide, and at a much lower price (Popović-Šević et al. 2021, Gamboa–Martins Gonçalves 2014). Zara has three clothing product lines, namely: women's, men's, and children's. Zara also has a fourth product line, beauty accessories.

Zara's main target customers are young consumers with an interest in fashion but limited purchasing power, whose income is not sufficient to afford luxury brands. They are willing to pay for fashion but are relatively price sensitive. Zara's product strategy is to create a sense of scarcity with a small number of items, thereby satisfying consumers' personalized needs for varied and unique clothing (Chunling 2020).

During the COVID-19 crisis, Zara has strengthened its digital presence (Popović-Šević et al. 2021). Currently, Zara offers online ordering, in-store pick-up, stock pick-up and exchange, and other after-sales services (Chunling 2020). On digital platforms, Zara emphasizes its commitment to sustainability, which was formulated in the 2000s but since then has been involved in a number of scandals in this area related to poor working conditions and human rights violations affecting its employees (Allam et al. 2020).

Digital Brand Management and Communication of Fast-Fashion Brands

As a result of the digital transformation, which has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the world moving into the digital space has also transformed the way fast-fashion brands communicate (Popović-Šević et al. 2021, Loureiro et al. 2019, Helal et al. 2018). Fast-fashion brands are also taking advantage of new info-communication technology and in many cases are conquering high-potential markets by deploying webshops. Today, the use of digital technology plays an important role in all processes of fast fashion (Gupta–Gentry 2018).

Competitiveness requires the development of strong fashion brands (Loureiro et al. 2019), as branded fashion products are more valuable. Brand management has become a business priority in the fashion industry because strong fashion brands set higher prices and attract consumers (Urošević–Završnik 2014). Consumers' perception, feeling, and experience of a brand become brand equity, which influences consumer behaviour. Consumers' brand loyalty creates a business advantage for the owners of fast-fashion brands. In many cases, consumers shop for pleasure because they want to have fun, spend their time pleasantly, relax, or relieve their mood (Loureiro et al. 2019). Fashion brands achieve a stronger impact in influencing consumer behaviour not by presenting the functional benefits of their products but by the sense of living and lifestyle they offer (Gupta–Gentry

2018, Keller 2013). This is especially true for fast-fashion brands, as most of the products are designed to be worn on ten occasions (Allam et al. 2020). Fashion brands are cultural products, and therefore the emotional and symbolic elements of the brand identity are of paramount importance (Helal et al. 2018). Followers of fast-fashion brands draw inspiration from the brands' stories and values to shape their personal and social identities. Brand experiences that stimulate emotions and self-expression trigger consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Helal et al. 2018).

For young generations, fast fashion and experimentation with in-between identities have become a lifestyle (Bauman 2005). Fast-fashion products are particularly attractive to consumers who prefer constant change in their fashion consumption behaviour, who embrace a culture of impulse buying, and who care little about the environment and social issues (Brewer 2019, McNeil–Moore 2015). Young consumers are aware of what they are buying and are also informed about the environmental and social impacts of brands. However, conscious consumption behaviour is partly linked to sustainability and ethical values, as consumption is a means of hedonistic experiences (Lendvai et al. 2021, Harris et al. 2016).

Digital brand management is an important prerequisite for the success of fast fashion in reaching and connecting with consumers (Barnes 2013). Through digital brand communication, fast-fashion brands are able to strongly communicate their brand equity and keep consumers up-to-date with their rapidly changing offerings. Fast-fashion brands dictate a spectacular pace to consumers, as their offerings are updated several times a week and products are available in limited quantities and for limited periods of time (Gupta–Gentry 2018). In the digital space, the brand experience is what the customer experiences when visiting a brand page or social media site. To create a successful digital brand experience, brand communication needs to be in line with the characteristics of the digital space and the expectations of visitors regarding the digital experience (Edelman 2010). Brand followers will move away from the brand if the digital brand experience falls short of the brand promise (Chernatony 2014). At the same time, creating a strong digital brand will result in high brand awareness and an increase in the number of online visitors.

The success of fast-fashion brands is hampered by doubts about the business model (Alexa et al. 2021, Allam et al. 2020, Blazquez et al. 2019). The negative effects of fast-fashion production and distribution processes and the consumer culture that encourages wastefulness in the environment and society are on the agenda (Sajn 2019, Brewer 2019). Industries that use unethical practices in their business processes try to balance the situation by communicating strongly about corporate responsibility to neutralize their negative public perception (Gao-Zeller et al. 2019). As the enforcement of corporate social responsibility is voluntary, communicating sustainability only increases brand credibility when backed up by action (Ihlen–Roper 2014).

The Communication Role of the Brand Page

The brand page is a key digital touch point between the brand and its audience (Wheeler 2018, Keller 2013), where consumers can navigate the multimodal content offer (text, image, sound, audiovisual) according to their own information needs. The proper management of brand pages, namely the development of aesthetic visual web design and user-friendly content management, the publication of useful and constantly updated content, search engine optimization, etc., is an important task of digital brand management (Ibeh 2005).

A quality brand website assures a positive brand experience and contributes to the development of trusting relationships between the brand and its users. The user's first impression of the brand is determined by the initial experience on the brand page. As a result of the digital transformation, users first navigate through brand websites and only engage with the brand in real life if the digital experience is positive. Research confirms that users perceive quality brand websites as more credible (Ibeh 2005). The aesthetic visual design of websites increases users' interest in the content on the brand website. If the user has a good impression of the visual design of the brand site, he/she will have more trust in the content on the brand site (Cyr et al. 2010). A good brand page is information-rich, i.e. it provides the user with information that is new, detailed, and constantly updated. If the information content is adequate and sustained over time, consumers will trust the brand more and more, i.e. brand loyalty will develop. The clarity of information also plays an important role in shaping the brand experience. The integration of news and professional blogs and the provision of opportunities to interact with customers are a sign of the brand site's professionalism. The seriousness of the brand site is also indicated by the display of the brand owner's company details and information for employees. A good brand site is both customer-generating and sales-driving. The sales interface is the integrated web shop, where detailed product information with accurate pricing is presented in such high quality that the customer no longer needs to physically experience the product.

The Communication Role of Social Media

Another prominent form of digital brand communication is by social media (Loureiro et al. 2019, Bauer–Kolos 2016, Keller 2013). On brand-maintained social media sites, brand followers meet the brand and one another (Helal et al. 2018, Gamboa–Martins Gonçalves 2014) and form a brand community (Vinerean–Opreana 2019). These sites allow brand owners to communicate brand identity, brand news, and new collection launches quickly and globally. Social media platforms are excellent channels for building relationships with consumers,

providing an opportunity to influence purchase intentions (Loureiro et al. 2019, Helal et al. 2018).

Among social media platforms, Instagram is the most popular and widely used in fashion brand communication, as it provides global reach and interactivity (Loureiro et al. 2019, Vinerean–Opreana 2019, Helal et al. 2018, Krepapa et al. 2016). Instagram provides a multimedia environment and allows for the two-way communication of images, videos, texts, and sounds, but the focus is on sharing visual content, i.e. visual storytelling (Russmann–Svensson 2016). Instagram's user interface is simple, friendly, and lightweight, and the dominance of visual communication makes it explicitly attractive (Krepapa et al. 2016). Instagram's prestige is high among young and digitally savvy consumers of fast-fashion brands (Krepapa et al. 2016, Nurnafia et al. 2021). Browsing fashion brands' Instagram pages has taken the place of window shopping, as consumers turn to this social media content primarily during the discovery and evaluation phase of a fashion brand's products (Vinerean–Opreana 2019). Well-constructed social media sites easily lead the consumer to the brand's page or online shop, encouraging a closer relationship with the brand and a purchase.

The role of brand communication on social media is to contribute to customer satisfaction through interactive digital experiences. To increase customer satisfaction, it is necessary to maintain two-way communication and use engagement tools such as quizzes, polls, responding to customer reviews, etc. Brands are less likely to exploit the interactive potential of social media, and social media brand communication is still used more to develop brand awareness and less to engage customers (Nurnafia et al. 2021, Helal et al. 2018).

The Role of Brand Identity in Brand Management

The basis for creating a strong brand is to develop a brand identity and define the values that the brand represents. The development of a brand idea does not create a strong brand, as strong brands are based on a quality and value-added product or service that is further shaped by customer perceptions (Aaker 2010).

While several market-oriented definitions of brand identity are known (Aaker 2002, Kapferer 2008, Chernatony 2014), in this paper we use the identity-based approach to brand identity developed by Burmann et al. (2017). The authors consider brand identity as the self-image of a brand, which summarizes the most important brand attributes as selected by brand creators. The characteristics of brand identity are closely related to the external perception of the brand (Burmann et al. 2009). Burmann et al. (2017) distinguished six elements of the brand identity structure, which are presented in *Table 1*. Along these six elements, an authentic brand identity has internal consistency (Balmer 2012).

Table 1. *Dimensions of brand identity for identity-based brand management*

Dimensions	Description
Origin	The origin of brand identity refers to the circumstances in which the brand was created.
Mission/ Vision	Examining the mission of the brand enables the identification of the brand attributes that differentiate the brand from its competitors.
Values	The core values of brand identity refer to the brand's beliefs, principles, and way of being. Core values are the emotional components of the brand and influence the nature of the relationships with stakeholders.
Personality	Personality traits encompass the personality traits of the brand's creators and the characteristics of the target audiences with whom the brand is most likely to engage. Personality is an emotional component of the brand, which determines the mindset and style of the brand's manifestations.
Competences	Competences maintain the brand's credibility and highlight the brand's excellence, i.e. the areas where the brand performs better than its competitors.
Offer	Brand offer reveals the benefits of using the brand to different target groups (internal and external). Brand benefits can be functional or symbolic (emotional, social, self-expression). The functional benefits of a brand refer to the usefulness of the branded product. A brand has an emotional benefit if any association with the brand evokes positive feelings in the consumer. Self-expression benefits occur when the brand becomes a symbol for consumers, giving them the opportunity to use the brand to express their identity, social affiliation, or prestige.

Source: Burmann et al. (2017)

Methodology

The analysis of Zara's digital brand identity was conducted in two steps: first, the communicative aspects of the brand site and the Instagram page were examined to verify the conditions of the digital brand experience, and, second, the structure and consistency of the brand identity on all three digital platforms were analysed. To investigate the digital brand identity, we looked at Zara's brand page[2] and Zara's Instagram page,[3] as well as the website of the company that created the brand, Inditex Group. Content from the Inditex site,[4] such as about the company (Group – Our Approach), the Zara brand (Brands – Zara), and the sustainability (Sustainability) menu items, were saved and analysed. The content of the Inditex

2 Zara Official Website: https://www.zara.com/hu/ (last access: 05.11.2022).
3 Zara Official: https://www.instagram.com/zara/ (last access: 05.11.2022).
4 Inditex Group Website: https://www.inditex.com/itxcomweb/en/home (last access: 05.11.2022).

corporate sustainability documents were reviewed, including *Sustainability Policy* (2020), *Sustainability Commitment and Roadmap* (2020), *Inditex Group Modern Slavery*, *Human Trafficking and Transparency in Supply Chain Statement for FY 2021*, and the *Annual Report 2021*.[5] Data from the Zara brand page and the Inditex corporate website were collected between 15 and 24 July 2022.

A difficulty in analysing the content of social media sites is the continuous change and dynamic nature of the content. Users are frequently accessing content, and therefore content can be constantly updated with comments, shares, etc. 51 posts on Zara's official Instagram page were analysed for the period of 15 July–20 August 2022. Data were collected on 24 August 2022. The analysis criteria for Zara's brand identity and the content analysis criteria for the Zara brand page and Instagram posts are presented in the tables below.

Table 2. *Assessment dimensions of brand identity (on the three digital platforms)*

Dimensions of brand identity	Description
Origin	starting, industry specificities, company characteristics
Mission	role to target groups, creating a competitive advantage
Values	values, principles, attitudes
Personality	style, personality traits, personality of the ideal customer
Competences	supporting of brand offers with results
Offers	brand benefits (functional, emotional, and self-expression)

Source: author's compilation based on Burmann et al. (2017)

Table 3. *Content analysis criteria for the brand page*

Criteria	Description
Quality of visual content	nature, quality, and use of product images
Delivery of information	layout of menus and content structure, search facility, use of filters, newsletter, professional blog on the site, company information, distribution network, company policy, careers page, website map
Interaction with the customers	contact details, chat interface, social media links, web shop, help

Source: author's compilation based on Keller (2013) and Ibeh (2005)

5 Inditex – Ethical Commitment: https://tinyurl.com/2p8z59wr (last access: 05.11.2022).

Table 4. *Content analysis criteria for the Instagram page*

Criteria	Description
Quality of the visual content of the posts	nature and quality of visual content, the use of colour in visual content, people in the visual content, nature of the environment captured by the visual content
Delivery of information of the posts	caption of posts, hashtags associated with posts
The interactivity generated by the posts	number of likes, number of comments, response to comments

Source: the author's compilation based on Russmann and Svensson (2016)

Findings

Digital Brand Management and Communication of Zara

Zara's Communication on the Brand Page

According to our observation, the visual design of the Zara brand site is engaging, following a minimalist web design. Zara's brand page was based on visuality (Popović-Šević et al. 2021). The opening image for the women's product line was a hero image that took up the entire visible area and depicted a white-skinned female figure; the opening image for the men's product line was a cinemagraph with a black-skinned male figure moving in a repetitive motion; the children's product line used several cartoon animation images. The brand site also included a web shop where products were presented using high-resolution and enlargeable images. Up to seven or eight images per product were available. The garments were worn by models, so the products could be observed in use, giving them a specific sense of life.

Zara's brand website contained up-to-date information and was characterized by a wealth of information. The information was arranged in a two- to three-level hierarchy, which met the requirements of a quality brand website. The main submenu items were grouped by gender and by children's product lines; under the main product lines were the clothing product groups, always starting with the new collection. Special collections (Sustainable, Studio, Workshop), Promotions, and Career Opportunities were also displayed at this hierarchical level. The brand page had a search option and filtering facility. There was a link to Inditex, the company that owns the Zara brand, and a store finder option to help find the nearest store. At the bottom of the brand page, there was a map of the website, which made the entire brand page transparent.

The brand page provided many opportunities to communicate with the consumers. When entering the site, the user's geographical location had to be entered, and then the brand page for the corresponding country was automatically launched. On the home page, there was a Help menu, where information on shopping and returning used clothing could be found. It also provided information on how to make a gift card and request gift wrapping. From the brand page, it was possible to go to Zara's social media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Pinterest. The website also featured a virtual store where products could be viewed in a similar layout to physical stores.

Overall, Zara's brand site provided a positive digital brand experience, as the user found themselves in a modern and slightly disconcerting experience through a visual content ecosystem. Professional images dominated the brand site and created a distinctive atmosphere. The textual information was complementary, but provided the user with all relevant product data. The well-functioning web shop indicated a customer-oriented approach.

Zara's Brand Communication on Instagram

With its 1.28 billion users worldwide (Statista 2022), Instagram is the fourth most popular social networking site in the world after Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Zara's official Instagram account has 53 million followers and has published 3,771 posts since its creation. According to our observation, the frequency of publishing posts was every three days, when 3–6 posts were published simultaneously.

The 51 posts published in the 35 days under review represented 1.4 posts per day. The posts were mainly based on professional photos. Of the 51 posts, nine were videos with a visual content of less than half a minute. Both the photos and videos were of professional quality, with no snapshots, selfies, or phone videos found in any of the 51 posts. The posts had captions and all but seven (about male fashion) posts had hashtags. The hashtags highlighted Zara's product lines and sustainability achievements: #zarawoman (18 posts), #zaramen (2 posts), #zarakids (3 posts), #zarababy (3 posts), #zarabeauty (6 posts), #zara (9 posts), #innovation, #joinlife (3-3 posts). The hashtags organized the posts and made the published content easy to follow. The posts communicated relevant visual content with appropriate captions, indicating appropriate communication.

The posts depicted Zara fashion products, mainly aiming to create an emotional impact, but did not contain direct calls for purchase. On Instagram, the familiar photos and videos from the brand's website were reintroduced. In 49 cases, the photos integrated into the posts were of a model wearing Zara products. The models were women (33), men (11), and children (5). Among the individuals, there were both female models with white skin, mostly blond, and models with

black skin. The situation was similar for male models, who included both white-skinned and black-skinned models. There were nine references to celebrities in the postings, six of which featured men's fashion products (Somali Findlay, Geron McGinley, Dylan Saje McKay, Steve McQueen) and three featured beauty accessories (Ajok Madel, Laff Michelle). In the photos and videos integrated into the posts, the models were in abstract or studio environments, which drew even more attention to the Zara product and the wearer. Visual content was characterized by a strong use of colour, with ten cases of black and white visuals. The strong colours created an atmosphere of modernity, while the use of black and white supported a retro feel.

The information was communicated by captioning the posts. The captions communicated the brand's mission and values, while the visual content focused on the brand's personality, style, and brand offer. Within the 51 posts, the following themes could be identified: new clothing collections (women's, men's, and children's), summer beauty collection, new pieces from the Studio and Workshop collections, and sustainability achievements (recycling of old clothes materials through innovative methods and the invention of new materials).

The strengths of Instagram communication consisted in providing visual experience and interactivity. The posts analysed had a minimum of 1,000 and a maximum of 63,000 likes. The posts with the fewest likes were the ones featuring retro pieces, while the posts featuring summer women's linen clothes had the most likes. The number of comments varied between 23 and 480, but in many cases the brand followers used emoticons to communicate with the brand and with each other. The fewest comments were on posts featuring menswear and the most on posts featuring very feminine clothes. In most cases, there was no formal response from Zara representatives to the problems raised by brand followers, unless it was about the launch of new collections or the distribution of different collections to national markets. However, clarity was strengthened by the fact that negative comments remained public, even if they were not answered.

Zara did not use any specific tools to engage customers on Instagram, such as polls, competitions, surveys, etc. No influencers appeared in the 51 posts, but classic celebrities were brought in to promote retro menswear and beauty accessories. There were no posts sharing or promoting the customers' brand experience. Zara's Instagram page was more characterized by sharing representative content than engaging content (Nurnafia et al. 2021). The Instagram page of Zara, although not very interactive, still provided a visually grounded and pleasant brand experience.

Digital Brand Identity of Zara and Its Consistency

The Origin of Zara's Brand Identity

The origin of Zara's brand identity was delivered on the Inditex website. Zara had its origins in the name of Spanish founder Amancio Ortega. The founder of Zara started a clothing company in 1963 and opened his first clothing store, Zara, in 1975. Thanks to his persistence, Zara had grown into a local, national, and then global clothing chain with a presence in 205 markets by 2021 (Inditex – Our Approach). Between 1991 and 1999, new clothing brands were added to the brand portfolio, which the owner consolidated into the Inditex Group. Inditex Group's biggest revenue was generated by the Zara brand (around 80 percent). Zara and its co-brands entered the e-commerce market between 2007 and 2017, where they became a reference. The Zara brand site and online shop operated internationally and in 98 countries. In the fashion industry, Zara is one of the biggest fast-fashion brands, whose business model has completely transformed the clothing industry (Loureiro et al. 2019). According to data on the Inditex website, in 2021, the number of visitors to its brand page in different languages was 6.2 billion (Inditex – Our Approach). Zara's Instagram page had no brand origin information. From the Instagram account, one could click through to the brand page to find details about the brand. On the brand page, there is a link to the brand owner's website, where information on the origin of the brand was available.

The Mission of Zara's Brand Identity

The mission of Zara's brand identity cannot be separated from the mission of Inditex, which was communicated on the corporate website. Inditex's mission is to create boldly innovative fashion based on innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and a commitment to progress. Inditex's mission was to provide customers with access to inspiringly beautiful fashion while taking responsibility for the future of the planet and its people (Inditex – Our Approach). The content of the mission statement refers to customer orientation, as there is no articulated commitment to other stakeholders. For each fashion brand owned by the Inditex Group, the company strived to deliver an outstanding brand experience.

Zara saw itself as a driving force in fashion, achieving its performance through responsibility and ambition. Zara's aim was to provide everyone, wherever they were, with the inspiring, always fashionable, responsibly made fashion they deserved (Inditex – Brands 2022). Zara seems to be fulfilling its mission of fashion through the tasteful and indeed bold fashion pieces presented on its brand website. Zara's Instagram page also fulfils its mission of modern fashion creation with its unique, powerful, and often startling visual content.

A commitment to sustainability was present in both Inditex's and Zara's mission. This commitment to sustainability was also included in the brand values and brand competencies, which will be discussed below. Zara also emphasized its commitment to sustainability on its Instagram page and shared visual content that served to demonstrate Zara's commitment to sustainability.

The Values of Zara's Brand Identity

On Zara's brand page or Instagram page, we do not explicitly see the presentation of values. To find information about the brand values, we should go to the Inditex website, where we can find values related to consumers and employees. The values for consumers were customer orientation, professional quality, and sustainability. Inditex placed its customers at the heart of its business model, and their satisfaction was the ultimate measure of the company's performance. On its brand page, Zara referred to the intimate relationship it had with its customers. They have sought to meet the needs of customers by having Zara designers respond to changing needs, respond to the latest trends and continuous customer feedback to provide customers with new fashion ideas in the right place at the right time.

Inditex also wanted to provide a high-quality digital brand experience by constantly updating its digital platforms (Inditex – Our approach). The comments that appeared next to each post on its Instagram page often asked about the launch of a fashion piece or collection, and official Zara responses to such questions were also available.

Zara also emphasized professionalism. Its integrated value chain, built to ensure customer satisfaction, allowed it to respond quickly and efficiently to real events and new challenges. At every stage of its business model, ensuring quality was a priority, and therefore the investment of resources was not neglected, as they stated (Inditex – Our approach). Zara had also embraced the integration of digital technology. By implementing and developing cutting-edge technologies, quality operations and tracking of the entire production chain were achieved. Zara's innovative fashion ideas have received acclaim from the fashion industry and consumers, but several authors have been critical of the ethics of its production processes (Allem et al. 2020, Sajn 2019).

Criticism of manufacturing processes is also linked to ensuring sustainability. Inditex and Zara have declared sustainability as one of their core brand values (Inditex – Sustainability, Zara – Sustainability). On its website, Inditex has committed to promoting all dimensions of sustainability, namely quality management and fair operating practices, proper management of environmental and social issues, respect for human rights among employees, consumers, and the local community (Inditex – Sustainability). The problem lies in the lack of integrity, as the criticisms that have been made have referred to the use of inhumane

working conditions and child labour in Zara companies or subcontractors, accusations that call into question Zara's overall values and brand credibility (Allem et al. 2020, Sajn 2019).

The list of values for employees was also available on the Inditex website, on the careers page (Inditex – Talent). Three of the Inditex-Zara values were related to personal attributes and three to human behaviour. The values for Zara were curiosity, creativity, and humility. These were the qualities that lead to excellent professional results for employees, which also added value to Zara. At the same time, Zara also emphasized individual value, diversity, collective development, and ethical-sustainable behaviour. These values were a reflection of Zara's people-centeredness.

Zara's Instagram posts communicated its values towards its customers, namely customer orientation, professionalism, and sustainability. This value communication was achieved through professional photos and videos integrated into the posts, as well as captions. Comments on sustainability posts also include negative comments questioning Zara's performance in this area.[6] Zara has not responded to the negative comments, with sustainability posts receiving between 12 and 24,000 likes. The posts on the social media site did not target employees or any other stakeholders.

The Personality of Zara's Brand Identity

Different aspects of Zara's brand personality were communicated on the Inditex career site, the Zara brand page, and the Zara Instagram page. The Inditex careers page provided a description of the ideal employees the company would like to have on its team – namely, team players who embrace diversity, are creative, innovative, and committed to progress. The brand personality was also reflected in the characteristics of the current workforce. Inditex had more than 165,000 employees from 177 nationalities. 76% of the employees were female, with an average age of 30 years. It is noteworthy, however, that communication with employees was limited to the Zara careers site, with the brand page and Instagram page targeting customers only.

The brand's personality towards customers could be experienced on the Instagram page. The characteristics of the models wearing Zara products were close to those of the ideal customer. Models of men, women, and children, both white and coloured, showed an appreciation for diversity, meaning that Zara was appealing to all those who value innovative and powerful fashion without

6 E.g. "autoimmunfreedom: Hi! I hope you are doing well. Please note that Zara Woman's Senior designer sent racist messages to a model and wasn't fired. Zara are also under investigation for using slave labor. We are boycotting Zara, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Pull and Bear, Stradivarius, Oysho, Uterque (all owned by Inditex)."

any other distinction. The men's and women's models were youthful, modern, and exclusive. Zara products highlight the uniqueness of the wearer. The strong colours of the visual content also emphasized character, distinction, and modernity. The style of the messages for the two core audience groups reflected Zara's brand personality, which was passionate, curious, demanding, innovative, and proactive.

The Offer of Zara's Brand Identity

Zara communicated the benefits of using its products to its customers through its brand page and online shop. At the same time, through its Instagram page, it generated interest and desire for brand products. The brand's offer was to provide a high-quality fashion experience for all, giving customers the originality and inspiration they craved after. Zara strived to provide customers with a sustainable and ethical way to follow fashion. Alongside its traditional collections, Zara has also created its *Join Life* sustainable collection. Additionally, Zara communicated the idea of sustainable fashion on its Instagram page, showcasing its fashion products and communicating its sustainability efforts.

Offers included consistent brand communication across all brand touch points. This was achieved through aesthetically pleasing and innovative window displays and a unified digital interface design, providing a cohesive brand and seamless shopping experience for customers. The brand offer focused not on the functionality of the products but on their uniqueness and the emotional and self-expression benefits associated with them. Zara expressed the emotional and self-expression benefits through visual communication. Zara's visual communication is consistent across the brand's site, online shop, and Instagram page, which means that the customer was presented with similar photos and videos across these channels.

The Competences of the Zara Brand Identity

Strong brands back up the credibility of their brand promise with data, testimonials, and success stories, highlighting areas where the brand was performing better than its competitors. Zara claimed to excel in three areas: innovative fashion creation, customer orientation, and sustainability (Inditex – Brands).

Zara has backed up its promise of innovative fashion creation with its excellent design team, its extensive retail network, its smart logistics, and, more recently, its technological transformation. In most cases, all these claims were not backed up by concrete results or testimonies from stakeholders. On the Inditex website, in relation to the development of design expertise, some members of the talented creative design team shared their experiences of working

within the company. Apart from the design team, other groups of employees did not speak. Operational excellence was evidenced by the data published in the annual report on the Inditex website, as well as by the publication on the corporate website of the results achieved according to various benchmarks (e.g. Most Innovative Company 2021, ranked 73rd in The Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations 2021, etc.).

Zara provided evidence of customer orientation through the brand experience created in its stores and on digital platforms. Across the different digital platforms, visual experiences were similar in quality, content, and atmosphere. Beyond the visual content seen on the platforms studied, no factual data on customer satisfaction was found on the brand's or the maintaining company's website. However, without having conducted an analysis, it is worth mentioning that Zara received a poor rating of 81% on the Trustpilot review-sharing site.[7] On Review.io, 39 percent of customers who posted a review recommended the brand.[8]

In 2021, Inditex published a sustainability report,[9] including its non-financial data, a report on employee engagement and respect for human rights, and a statement on community investment. The GRI methodology[10] was followed in the preparation of the non-financial report, and a range of data was available in the report. The report on the employee engagement described the role of human resources in the different areas of the company, with less concrete data and more future plans and objectives. The report about the human rights focuses on the principles and strategies, the most important aspects of Inditex's commitment to human rights, which will shape its future operations and business processes. The report on community investment contained plenty of information about the projects supported by the company and its beneficiaries all around the world. These reports do not specify the source of the data presented, nor do they mention third parties to confirm the authenticity of the data.

Sustainability was also argued by the launch of *Join Life*, a sustainable clothing collection, which was based on the use of more environmentally friendly raw materials in the production of products and enabled the life cycle of products to be extended. Also demonstrating Zara's commitment to sustainability was its clothing recycling programme initiative,[11] which allowed customers worldwide to return their worn clothes to Zara, thus helping to reduce waste and the consumption of new raw materials. Most recently, Zara has created a platform called the Sustainability Innovation Hub, which "promotes new technologies, materials and processes to reduce the environmental impact of our products,

7 https://tinyurl.com/y4jh8npb (last access: 05.11.2022).
8 https://tinyurl.com/yebsdwhc (last access: 05.11.2022).
9 https://tinyurl.com/3f2c5ccf (last access: 05.11.2022).
10 https://tinyurl.com/5n6b28ww (last access: 05.11.2022).
11 Clothes Collection Programme: https://tinyurl.com/bdhe5p8r (last access: 05.11.2022).

helping to move towards more sustainable solutions and circularity" (Zara – Sustainability – Innovation).

There are a number of concerns about Zara's sustainability communications. The sustainability reporting of the Inditex Group has been questioned by researchers and is seen as greenwashing or hypocrisy in several respects (Alexa et al. 2021, Allam et al. 2020, Brewer 2019, Saju 2019). The lack of credibility of Zara's sustainability is often voiced in the press and on professional blogs.[12] The scandals surrounding the company (in 2018, 2013, 2011), which were linked to human rights violations and poor working conditions (Allam et al. 2020), have further damaged the brand's credibility. Articles on professional blogs also criticize Zara's polluting behaviour, which is also dangerous for workers. Zara usually produces its products in the Global South, where garment workers are paid low wages and work in dangerous conditions.[13] Last but not least, Zara is held responsible for producing large quantities of clothing, much of which ends up in landfills.[14] Over the past two years, Zara has adopted a number of firm-level policies (e.g. *Corporate Social Responsibility Policy* and *Environmental Sustainability Policy* 2020), signed agreements, and entered into partnerships with recognized organizations in the field of sustainability (e.g. United Nations Global Compact, International Labour Organization, The Fashion Pact, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals, Sustainable Apparel Coalition, etc.) to strengthen its sustainability, but it has yet to take concrete action and show visible results (*Annual Report* 2021).

Summary

The research presented in this study investigated the characteristics and consistency of the digital brand identity of the fast-fashion brand Zara. The research relied on digital content analysis and document analysis. The content analysed was collected from the Zara brand page, the website of Zara's owner, Inditex, and Zara's Instagram page. Of the three digital platforms, Zara's brand page and Instagram page reflected a strong customer orientation and conveyed visual content that was specifically targeted at consumers and aimed to create an innovative consumer experience. The Instagram page was eye-catching and captured a fascination with fashion products through the sense of living and lifestyle it conveyed, while the online shop, integrated with the brand page,

12 The Truth about Fast Fashion: Can You Tell How Ethical Your Clothing Is by Its Price? https://tinyurl.com/mwrud2kt (last access: 05.11.2022); How Ethical Is Zara? https://tinyurl.com/ms2rz6kk (last access: 05.11.2022); Changing Market Foundation: Dirty Fashion. https://tinyurl.com/2xycpfbx (last access: 05.11.2022).

13 Is Zara Ethical and Sustainable? https://tinyurl.com/bdf97hj5 (last access: 05.11.2022).

14 Ibid.

convinced the customer with its high-quality and detailed visual product presentation. Zara's brand page and Instagram page showcase four elements of brand identity. The content conveyed on both platforms hinted at Zara's mission to provide shoppers with access to powerful and innovative fashion products. There was an emphasis on sustainable fashion creation with a dedicated sustainability menu on the brand page and posts on the Instagram page. These platforms conveyed the values of customer orientation, professionalism, and sustainability through the content they published. Both on the brand page and the social media page, the brand's personality was asserted as bold, modern, and challenging. The brand's symbolic offer was easy to follow on both the Instagram page and the brand page. On both platforms, the origins and competencies of the brand identity were missing elements.

More details about Zara's brand identity were available on the Inditex website. The corporate site was open to more stakeholders, more specifically customers, workforce, and financiers. The corporate website included a history of Zara's origins and a description of the competences that underpinned the brand promise. Inditex's site has increasingly published documents to demonstrate the sustainability of the whole group and, within it, the Zara brand. The credibility of Zara's brand identity, despite the publication of numerous sustainability documents, is questionable, as the source of data from the reports are not provided. In both academic and professional circles, the Zara brand has been attacked for greenwashing or hypocrisy, as it performs well in terms of reporting and ratings, but several scandals have erupted around the brand that have cast doubt on the data contained in the reports and ratings. Zara's brand identity is flawed by a lack of competence to back up its promises about its workforce, while sustainability scandals also focus on poor working conditions for its workforce and human rights abuses.

Examining Zara's brand page, Instagram page, and Inditex website, the brand identity is seen as consistent towards customers but incomplete towards the workforce and other stakeholders. Credibility of the brand identity was the most problematic, as in addition to well-qualified sustainability reports, stakeholders are also aware of the environmental and social problems caused by the company that maintains the brand. Unfortunately, fast-fashion brands' customers are not sensitive enough to social and environmental problems (Brewer 2019, McNeil–Moore 2015).

A shortcoming of the presented research is the one-sided approach, as the focus is on Zara's brand identity, which reflects the perspective of the brand owner. It would be worthwhile to continue the research by exploring Zara's brand image in order to gain insights into external stakeholders' perceptions of the brand. Here, the content of opinion-sharing platforms about the Zara brand, such as Sitejabber, Trustpilot, Review.io, Good on You, etc., could be investigated. It would be useful

to assess the brand credibility and the reputation of the brand owner company and then monitor the impact of brand credibility and company reputation among brand stakeholders.

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 155–168

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0008

The Global Well-Being Study of Szeklerland

Tímea KRIZBAI
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
krizbaitimea@ms.sapientia.ro

István ZSIGMOND
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
zsigmond.istvan@ms.sapientia.ro

Abstract. On a global level, the analysis of the well-being of countries and ethnic groups is receiving increasing attention. As part of a larger study, we used the Global Well-Being scale among Hungarian residents in the Szeklerland region[1] of Romania. The scale aims to measure the well-being experienced emotionally, psychologically, socially, and spiritually (Oláh–Kapitány-Fövény 2012). The study was conducted using an online questionnaire filled out by 1,117 persons aged from 16 to 89, from 286 settlements in Harghita, Covasna, and Mureş counties. The results show that the global welfare indicators have average or above average values among the respondents from Szeklerland. The emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being are above the cut-off score. The well-being of the young age group and that of women is higher. In rural regions, the spiritual well-being is also higher.

Keywords: global well-being, mental health, positivity, happiness, life satisfaction

Introduction

In recent decades, psychological research has shown a bigger interest in positive psychology, examining protective factors to learn more about the personality dimensions, abilities, competences that help an individual to cope with stress, live a healthy life, and feel happy. Studies show that protective psychological factors have a great impact on health, and the well-being, or the feeling of happiness can increase the level of T lymphocytes in the blood. Global well-being is an important health psychological indicator as well. It provides information

1 Hungarian: *Székelyföld*; Romanian: *Ţinutul Secuiesc*; Latin: *Terra Siculorum* – it is a historic and ethnographic area in Romania, inhabited mainly by Székelys, a subgroup of Hungarians.

on how a particular ethnic group or society lives and how advanced indicators of emotional, social, spiritual, and psychological well-being are. This, of course, has a number of consequences. The level of global well-being in a society indicates the level at which the society is functioning economically and mentally and also points out the positive impact it has on health behaviour. A person who has good social relations, who has future goals is a lot more probable to analyse their behaviours' future impact and, for example, smokes less compared to a person whose social and emotional well-being is lower.

The present study is part of a larger, comprehensive study conducted in collaboration with the Positive Psychology Research Group of Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest, Hungary), which aimed to draw a happiness map of Hungary and Szeklerland and to perform a comparative analysis of the well-being indicators. In this study, we outline global well-being indicators as sub-data from a highly complex, multivariate study.

Concepts of Health

Health means the ability to adapt to ever-changing living conditions, expectations, and stimuli. Living conditions also have an impact on the quality of life, so in addition to individual responsibility for health, economic-cultural-political influences also play an important role. In this sense, we can talk about physical, mental, emotional, and social health (Füzesi–Lampek 2007). Physical health is the most obvious dimension of the health concept that we tend to refer to – it is the mechanical functioning of the body. By mental health, we mean the integrity and performance of mental functioning. Emotional health is the recognition of feelings and an adequate emotion regulation. The concept of emotional health refers to the ability to cope positively with stressors, internal conflicts, and tensions. Mental health can be linked, on the one hand, to faith and the ability to form a relationship with the transcendent, and, on the other, it is the capacity to be in harmony with ourselves and the world. Social health refers to the ability to form and maintain relationships with others. It is intended to highlight the system of interactions that exist between the health of society and the ability of an individual to live a healthy life. Women living below the subsistence level, exposed to abuse at work cannot be healthy, nor can those living in minorities, persecution, and cultural deprivation (United Nations 2014).

According to the WHO's definition from 1987, health is the extent to which an individual or a group is able to achieve its aspirations and meet its needs on the one hand and to influence, change, or cope with the environment on the other. Therefore, health is not a goal but rather a resource for everyday life. In this sense, health determinants can basically be divided into two groups (Ewles–

Simnett 1999): lifestyle factors (which are related to the individual's way of life) and social, economic, and environmental factors in the broadest sense (such as the social assistance system, the employment and income system, etc.).

Forrai (2005) depicts the system of health determinants in a complex model, according to which health is determined by the ecological system, climate, topography, region, landscape, and environment. Society, culture, the political system, industrial production, occupations, and social values play an important role as well. Beyond the influence of these environmental and socio-political factors, health is determined by: genetic health, which includes inherited predisposition, organ vulnerability; health behaviours in terms of eating habits, physical activity, work–life balance, working conditions, psychoactive substance use; social support, the impact of family members, relatives, co-workers and neighbourhood, and an important influencing factor, the institutionalized impact, education, profession, and social policy.

In terms of health, health behaviour, health promotion, disease prevention, and positive psychology play a very important role. Positive psychology, although it has been present for a long time in psychological thinking, became important after World War II and an independent trend in the 1990s. The traumas caused by the war have noticed that there are more people who have gone through many difficulties and traumas yet remained mentally healthy, and even the problems they encountered appeared as more approachable for them as they were hardened and their personalities had developed in a more positive direction. The goal of positive psychology is to research and strengthen factors that help the prosperity and well-being of the individual and the community to develop. Positive psychology offers a new perspective in mental health research. This discipline focuses mostly on people's strengths rather than their weaknesses, so the focus of positive psychology is the research of positive emotions and the science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions that promise to improve the quality of life and prevent the development of pathology that arises when life is bleak and meaningless (Seligman–Csíkszentmihályi 2014).

Health from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

In a positive psychological interpretation, health should be defined as the overall picture of a set of symptoms. Health symptoms consist of components of global well-being that encompass emotional well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being, and spiritual well-being (*Table 1*).

Table 1. *The model of global well-being (Oláh 2005)*

Global well-being			
Emotional well-being	**Psychological well-being**	**Social well-being**	**Spiritual well-being**
Positive affects	Self-acceptance	Social acceptance	Joy of a transcendent experience
	Personal growth	Social actualization	
Happiness	Life goals	Social contribution	Experience of universality
	Environmental mastery	Social coherence	
Life satisfaction	Autonomy	Social integration	Vertical and horizontal responsibility
	The ability to manage the environment		

Source: authors' edition based on Oláh (2005)

The dimension of emotional well-being means happiness, life satisfaction, and the predominance of positive affect. The dimension of psychological well-being includes self-acceptance, personal growth, life goals, autonomy, positive relationships with others, and the ability to manage the environment. The dimension of social well-being encompasses social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social coherence, and social inclusion. And the dimension of spiritual well-being refers to the joy of a transcendent experience, the experience of universality, and vertical and horizontal responsibility (Oláh 2005).

A high level of global well-being means that the individual is functioning well or effectively (in all areas of nature, biologically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually) and positive emotions dominate their life, experiencing the well-being of life. Positive psychology has also drawn attention to the fact that mental health can be investigated similarly to mental illness and can be conceived as a mixture of emotional well-being and psychological and social well-being. Mental health should be identified with the metaphor of flourishing, a condition in which an individual is able to bring out the best in themselves, like a plant in bloom. Mental health symptoms include physical vitality, effective coping with stress, resilience, and positive self-esteem. Flourishing thus indicates a high level of mental health and refers to the experience of a well-functioning life (Huppert 2009, Keyes 2002, Ryff–Singer 1998).

Measuring Subjective Well-Being

Measuring the level of happiness (or subjective well-being, formulated more scientifically) has received increased attention, and it became mainly a topic of positive psychology. In our study, we analysed the global well-being in accordance

with the model of Oláh (2005), but, as it follows, we briefly list other studies as well that approach the global well-being concept in a different relation with other positive psychology concepts.

There is research focusing on the cognitive assessment of happiness, life satisfaction. Others emphasize the focus on the subjective well-being construct of happiness, measuring both the positive and negative affect (Diener et al. 1999, Diener 2009). There were elaborated and evaluated several measures of subjective well-being (for reviews, see: Diener et al. 1999, Larsen et al. 1985, Pavot 2008). In his well-being theory, Seligman (2016) selected five components that people pursue and that contribute to well-being. The PERMA model highlights five important elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Research has shown significant positive associations between each of the PERMA components and physical health, vitality, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and commitment within organizations (e.g. Kern et al. 2014).

Results indicate that life satisfaction, negative and positive affect have small associations with marital status, whereas employment is strongly correlated with these three factors (Jebb et al. 2020). As a result, employment should be included as a side-variable in surveys measuring well-being. Moreover, life meaning had strong, consistent associations with all subjective well-being measures across regions and ages (Jebb et al. 2020), indicating the needs of according more importance to the development of self-planning and goal-setting trainings even in the country-level educational systems. We can conclude that measuring happiness can have important practical aspects, offering results to be considered when elaborating institutional and country-level educational policies.

Measuring Global Well-Being in Hungary

Oláh et al. (2018) have developed a questionnaire for measuring five pillars of mental health, called MHT (Mental Health Test, i.e. *Mentális Egészség Teszt – MET* in Hungarian language), originally containing 34 items from five areas of mental health: 1) global and subjective well-being (G); 2) savouring (S); 3) creative, i.e. executing individual and social efficiency (CE); 4) self-regulation (SR); 5) resiliency (R). Results show that MET is a good model for Hungarian adults (Oláh et al. 2018) and also for the 10–14-year-old child population (Vargha et al. 2019), as confirmed by item analysis and confirmative factor analysis (CFA). The structural and content validity of MET and an outstanding internal consistency of MET scales were also confirmed (Vargha et al. 2020).

One of the pillars of the MET is the Global Well-Being Scale. In its original version (Oláh et al. 2018), the scale collects information by questions grouped into subfactors: the emotional well-being (5 items), psychological well-being

(4 items), social well-being (4 items), and spiritual well-being (4 items) factor (see *Table 2*). Subjects are asked to indicate on a 6-point Likert scale (from "not characteristic at all" to "fully characteristic") their subjective well-being as a response to the statements listed in *Table 2*.

Table 2. *Items and factors of the Global Well-Being Scale (Oláh et al. 2018)*

	Statement	Scale
1	I am basically a happy person.	Emotional
2	In my everyday life, there is at least three times more joy than sorrow.	Emotional
3	I am satisfied with my life in almost every aspect.	Emotional
4	Harmony characterizes both my narrower and broader environment.	Emotional
5	My life is full of meaningful goals.	Psychological
6	I am getting on well when I solve problems in my work or in my private life.	Psychological
7	I am continuously developing year by year in almost every aspect.	Psychological
8	I am satisfied with what I have reached by now in my life.	Emotional
9	I belong to several communities, where I feel well and fully accepted.	Social
10	I am happy to feel that I am part of a big community of persons responsible for the future.	Spiritual
11	I am an active member of communities fighting for the way of social development that I also prefer.	Social
12	I live in accepting and supporting communities.	Social
13	Strengthening the union of people for the maintainable future is an aim that I actively promote.	Spiritual
14	I get much energy from the moments when I experience that I am part of the universe.	Spiritual
15	I am satisfied with myself in almost every aspect.	Psychological
16	I am unambiguously a developer of my social world by my work and social activity.	Social
17	I am grateful to my fate, that many people live in the world who think similarly to myself, and even unknowingly I feel I belong to the their community.	Spiritual

Source: authors' edition based on Oláh et al. (2018)

Aim of the Study, Population and Methods

For historical reasons, approximately 1.2 million ethnic Hungarians[2] live in Transylvania, a region of Romania. In the Eastern part of this region, there is a relatively compact minority of Hungarians called Szeklers, who have inhabited this region for more than 1,000 years. Although they speak the same language as the citizens of Hungary, they have a slightly different culture, values, and habits due to the relative geographical isolation from the larger mass of Hungarian people living in Hungary. Moreover, their culture was also politically isolated in the last decades (between 1940 and 1990). As we mentioned in the introductory section, this study is part of a larger comparative study between Hungarians from the motherland and Hungarians from Szeklerland, but in this article we present data only about the well-being concerning Szeklerland due to the big amount of data from the original comparative study.

The aim of our study is to measure the global well-being of the inhabitants of the Szekler region. Specifically, our research goal was to compare the global well-being of the following groups from this region: age groups (younger and older adults), gender groups, people living in rural and urban areas, and people with tertiary education as compared to people who have graduated from lower-level education institutions.

The study was conducted with the help of an online questionnaire composed of 10 questions about demographic data, 17 questions measuring global well-being (as detailed in *Table 2*), 4 questions measuring the perceived physical condition, 16 questions evaluating psychological immunity (based on Oláh et al. 2010), 8 questions of the Flourishing Scale of Diener (2009), 12 questions of the Savouring, and 7 questions of the Flourishing Scale of Huppert (Huppert 2009). In this paper, we report only the findings related to the Global Well-Being Scale and its subscales. The 17 questions used a 6-point Likert scale for self-evaluation (in Hungarian), ranging from "not characteristic at all" to "totally characteristic". The online questionnaire was published on Google Forms, and it was promoted in the Facebook advertising system by way of paid promotions. A total of 1,117 people living in Szeklerland filled in the questionnaire, including persons aged from 16 to 89 years. The subjects in the study were all online respondents from towns and villages of Harghita, Covasna, and Mureş counties (a total of 286 settlements).

2 https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rpl-2011/rezultate-2011/ Last access: 05.11.2022.

Results

Well-Being and Subscale Comparison across Different Population Groups

In accordance with previous studies indicating high internal consistency of the four subscales (Vargha et al. 2020), Cronbach-α values indicated high reliability of the subscales: Emotional well-being – 0.870, Psychological well-being – 0.815, Social well-being – 0.86, and Spiritual well-being – 0.856. Then, a global well-being score was calculated by averaging the values of the Likert-scale grades of the 17 questions (see *Table 2*). When comparing the global well-being scores (calculated by summing the values of the four subscales) in accordance with those of males and females, no significant differences can be found. However, when it comes to the emotional well-being subscale, the scores of females are significantly higher than those of males (see *Table 3*).

Table 3. *Comparing well-being results of gender groups*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test	
					F	Sig	t	Sig.
Global well-being (mean)	Female	809	4.02	.82	2.32	.128	1.29	.196
	Male	308	3.95	.91				
Emotional well-being	Female	808	4.08	.90	2.79	.095	2.55	.011*
	Male	307	3.92	.99				
Psychological well-being	Female	805	4.11	.87	1.28	.257	.12	.898
	Male	306	4.10	.91				
Social well-being	Female	804	3.90	1.04	.27	.598	.62	.534
	Male	305	3.85	1.08				
Spiritual well-being	Female	801	3.99	1.05	3.12	.077	.85	.394
	Male	306	3.93	1.14				

Source: authors' computation

We have created two equal artificial groups from the respondents using a median split (the median age is 36 years). The younger age group reports significantly higher global well-being (see *Table 4*) in the case of three of the four subscales. In the case of the emotional well-being subscale, the differences are not significant (although they are close to the significance threshold).

Table 4. *Comparing the well-being results of age groups*

	Age group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test	
					F	Sig	t	Sig.
Global well-being (mean)	Younger	541	4.07	.83	.27	.602	2.55	.011*
	Older	576	3.94	.87				
Emotional well-being	Younger	541	4.09	.93	.93	.334	1.82	.068
	Older	574	3.99	.92				
Psychological well-being	Younger	540	4.16	.90	1.69	.193	2.07	.038*
	Older	571	4.05	.87				
Social well-being	Younger	541	3.97	1.04	.00	.997	2.67	.008*
	Older	568	3.80	1.05				
Spiritual well-being	Younger	540	4.05	1.04	.53	.467	2.27	.023*
	Older	567	3.90	1.10				

Source: authors' computation

Table 5. *Comparing the well-being results of people with different education levels*

	Education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test	
					F	Sig	t	Sig.
Global well-being (mean)	Secondary	410	3.86	.84	.03	.854	-4.10	.000**
	Tertiary	682	4.07	.83				
Emotional well-being	Secondary	408	3.89	.91	.22	.635	-3.94	.000**
	Tertiary	682	4.12	.92				
Psychological well-being	Secondary	406	3.94	.90	.65	.419	-4.44	.000**
	Tertiary	680	4.18	.85				
Social well-being	Secondary	404	3.71	1.05	.06	.802	-4.07	.000**
	Tertiary	680	3.97	1.03				
Spiritual well-being	Secondary	404	3.90	1.07	.01	.910	-1.42	.154
	Tertiary	680	4.00	1.07				

Source: authors' computation

Out of the 1,117 respondents, 21 have graduated primary-level education, 410 secondary-level education, and 682 tertiary education (4 respondents did not specify their educational level). When comparing the well-being results of the groups with secondary and tertiary education, we can see that people with a college or university degree have significantly higher scores in the global well-being scale in general and in the emotional, psychological, and social well-being subscales (see *Table 5*). However, in terms of spiritual well-being (indicating the joy of a transcendent experience, the experience of universality), there are no differences between the two groups.

We then compared the results of people living in urban and rural areas. The urban group was made up of people living in cities (730 respondents) and the rural group of people living in villages (389 respondents), as registered in the Romanian National Institute of Statistics. In general, people living in rural areas have significantly higher global and spiritual well-being scores. With the other subscales, there are no significant differences (*Table 6*).

Table 6. *Comparing the well-being results of people living in urban and rural areas*

	Residence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test	
					F	Sig	t	Sig.
Global well-being (mean)	Rural	387	4.07	.82	3.09	.079	1.98	.047*
	Urban	730	3.97	.87				
Emotional well-being	Rural	385	4.10	.91	.76	.382	1.50	.133
	Urban	730	4.01	.93				
Psychological well-being	Rural	384	4.14	.89	.01	.900	.98	.325
	Urban	727	4.09	.88				
Social well-being	Rural	383	3.95	1.01	2.89	.089	1.54	.122
	Urban	726	3.85	1.06				
Spiritual well-being	Rural	383	4.10	1.01	4.21	.040	2.94	.003**
	Urban	724	3.90	1.10				

Source: authors' computation

Discussion and Conclusions

The global well-being indicators show average or above-average values among the respondents from Szeklerland. Both emotional and psychological and social and spiritual well-being are adequate. The well-being of the younger generation is higher, probably because they did not experience too many losses, their social relationships are more colourful, and their emotional life is richer than that of the older population. In a study conducted by Deaton (2008), the results indicate a decreasing tendency of life satisfaction with age, especially in Eastern European and former Soviet Union countries. Similarly, Bălțătescu (2014) and Della Giusta et al. (2011) in their study on Romanian population and the people in the United Kingdom found that life satisfaction declines with age.

Previous results indicate that there are relatively small differences across the lifespan in terms of negative affect, whereas decreases in positive affect are larger (Jebb et al. 2020). We can conclude that the increased level of happiness of the younger people is a signal that the happiness level is increasing among members of the younger generation in the Szeklerland region of Romania.

The association between gender differences and subjective well-being has been investigated in several studies. Researchers consistently report that men and women have similar levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and other global measures of subjective well-being. In our population, women's emotional well-being is higher, which is an expected result because women's emotional intelligence is generally more advanced than men's, and they value the simple joys of life more, experience happiness more often, and have a higher proportion of positive than negative affect. Reid (2004) found that men's well-being is predicted better by self-esteem than by the degree in which they live in a relationship characterized by harmony. In the case of women, self-esteem is also a predictor of subjective well-being (although more moderately as compared to men); however, relationship harmony is more a robust predictor of well-being as compared to men.

Inglehart (2002) concluded that gender differences in subjective well-being are concealed by an interaction effect between age, gender, and well-being. Thus, our study also suggests that there is an interaction between gender, age, and well-being, indicating statistically significant gender differences in subjective well-being, leading to theoretically interesting questions. Women under 45 tend to be happier than men, but they become less happy over time. Tesch-Römer et al. (2008) found a connection between gender differences in subjective well-being and societal gender inequality. Their findings suggest that unequal access to individual resources and opportunity structures influence gender differences regarding subjective well-being.

Abdullahi et al. (2019) in their study conducted with 734 people found that the emotional well-being of females is higher than that of their male counterparts. Females have a more advanced emotion regulation compared to males. A possible explanation for this could be that the image of the Szekler male in the society corresponds to the image of a protective dominant male. Thus, Szekler males from a very young age perceive that being emotional is a sign of weakness and failure, which is probably why emotional intelligence is not so important to them.

In the rural area, spiritual well-being might be higher because rural citizens might usually feel closer to nature and are usually more religious than urbanites. Our findings are thus similar to those of Requena (2016) conducted in rural and urban areas of France. They found that rural inhabitants have a higher level of happiness than urban inhabitants. Investigating the association between the living environment and subjective well-being, Mair Thivierge-Rikard (2010) found that the frequency of interactions with friends, neighbours, or relatives has a stronger positive effect on subjective well-being for rural older adults than for those living in urban areas.

We found that those with higher education qualifications also experience higher levels of well-being. Self-acceptance works better for them; they have

more goals driving them, have higher autonomy, and report more positive human relationships. Keys et al. (2002) also found that the probability of optimal well-being increased with education. Conventional wisdom holds that education contributes to the "good life" in adulthood. However, previous research reported no association between formal educational attainment and subjective well-being (e.g. Witter et al. 1984). Thus, additional experiments are needed to confirm that education has indirect effects on well-being, as pointed out by Helliwell (2003).

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Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 169–172

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0009

Anna Keszeg: Redesigining Fashion. Media Operations of Contemporary Fashion /Case studies/[1]

Budapest: Metropolitan University of Budapest, METU Theory 3, 2022.

Emese LENGYEL
University of Debrecen, Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies, Hungary
lengyelemese1@gmail.com

Anna Keszeg has collected studies over seven years (at Babeş–Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design and at the Metropolitan University of Budapest) in her new book titled *Redesigning Fashion. Media Operations of Contemporary Fashion*, published as the third book of the METU Theory series. As a society, culture, and media researcher, the author interprets the phenomenon of contemporary fashion over four chapters of studies. Some of the published writings have been updated; however, in the case of two chapters, it would have meant a complete rewriting, and the author emphasized: "The reason why I decided not to abandon these texts is that I am being warned how quickly the discussed phenomena become obsolete"[2] (p. 9).

Fashion researchers have to face several prejudices in the academic field, as "[…] the academic perception of fashion often overlaps with the everyday perception of those that are related to fashion" (p. 11). Nevertheless, this sub-discipline is exciting and engaging: fashion can be, for instance, examined as a clearly visible component – that brings meaning – of the contemporary world or the visual mediator of contemporary social, economic, political movements and tendencies. The first chapter gives an overview of the conceptual system of fashion, based on especially carefully and logically built subsections, so readers less familiar with the topic will soon become insiders of fashion research. First, the focus is on Malcolm Barnard's concept, which appears in the author's 2007 fashion theory textbook. Keszeg notes that this concept tries to objectify the phenomenon and writes that the word "fashion" has at least two accepted

1 The original, Hungarian-language title of the book is: *Divat-újratervezés. A kortárs divat médiaműködései*.

2 All the quotes from the reviewed book are translated into English by the author of this review. The language of the book is Hungarian.

meanings in everyday use: "The two important meanings are the following: (1) fashion initially means those objects and techniques that cover or decorate the body, as well as the social practices related to this phenomenon (from the industries of production to the social practices of wearing them); (2) secondly, it means how we communicate with textiles and materials intended to cover, shape, and enforce bodies – timelessness, spatial awareness, identity, stance, etc." (p. 12). The author adds that the Hungarian explanatory dictionary does not include the first meaning yet divides the second one into subsections. However, what is there to know about the academic embedding of fashion-related activities? This particular area is researched by the field of fashion studies, whose significant academic institutionalization took place over the past three decades, but the research of the phenomenon of fashion appears in several other disciplines as well such as sociology, media studies, art history, cultural studies, etc.

Anna Keszeg promises a research that is primarily based on communication and media studies and emphasizes the goal of comprehending the communication strategies and media logic that are behind the content made by contemporary personas of the fashion industry. A starting point of the communication strategies is that we can talk about constructing a universe in the case of the contemporary fashion industry, in the same sense as in many fields of the entertainment industry. First of all, fashion – as a cultural industry – is being discussed, and then the issues of immersion and universal likeness are brought up from the point of view of media convergence and transmediality. In the introductory fashion-related thoughts, we can find the following: "(1) fashion as the paradigm of searching for something new and inherent in modernity – I call this approach the avant-garde paradigm […]; (2) fashion as the adaptation to social conventions, the area for self-expression – I call this one the social paradigm; (3) fashion as the most widely visible industry that is able to create meaning – I call this approach the cultural-industrial paradigm […]" (p. 16).

The second chapter is titled *Universe Construction in Contemporary Fashion*, in which Anna Keszeg writes about fashion movies, the connection between fashion and contemporary TV series, the representation of the fashion industry in movies, as well as native advertising. The author describes the genre of digital fashion movies as follows: "The genre of fashion movies is not a new-fangled attempt to present the prominence, the unknowability, and the exclusivity of the visualization of this industry in a way that it differs from other procedures of promotion" (p. 41). The genre is the contact point of advertising, the movie, and the fashion industry. The author mentions that the co-operation between fashion and movies began around 1896, when the Lumière brothers recorded a dancer, and emphasizes that with the birth of narrative cinema two types of movies can be distinguished. One type is when the focus is on the phenomenon of fashion, alongside fashion-related representation. The other type includes

slightly documentary movies. The researcher gives an insight into the Chanel universe, and then the spotlight is turned on the relation between the art of movies and the art of fashion. Most of the motion picture references are well-known works (such as Breakfast at Tiffany's or the Sissi trilogy); however, the Émile Zola adaptation series called *The Paradise* – which is a major success in public media channels – is the subject of a specific analysis. We can read about the latter in the context of fashion as the birth of the spatial system: the novel adaptation is a great example of a core novel of the psychology of shopping, one that theorizes the exploitation of women by the machinery called capitalism, and how it becomes an emphasized emancipatory narrative throughout the series.

How can social dynamics be interpreted in fashion consumption? Is the opposition of amateurs and professionals or content creators and consumers still valid? The third chapter, inter alia, seeks the answer to these questions by reviewing several disciplines. "In 2020, the fashion industry survived its most serious crisis of legitimacy. Such crisis was not a novelty: mass media had written about the fashion industry being the first, second, third, and so on most polluting industry […], and taking these facts into account resulted in redesigning strategies in many cases" (p. 150) – with this phrase, the author introduces the line of thought behind the evaluation of the fashion industry and its current dynamic in 2021. Here, the concept of amateur is introduced both in a media- and a culture-related sense. First of all, it is stated that the science behind the contrast between the words amateur and professional does not take the pejorative Hungarian meaning of the word "amateur" into account. The author goes back to the amateur/academic concept pair, where Lévi-Strauss is mentioned among several others, and the museological approach to ethnography is also acknowledged. This is followed by the dynamics of professional positions; hence, the previous concepts are deepened. As the author writes, contemporary movements are dominated by three professional profiles that – when shown – can trace the rise of amateurism. These are craft designers, digital-fashion leaders, and experts whose elite-producing models prove that the dynamics of elite production in the field of contemporary fashion have accelerated on the one hand and have become more diversified on the other.

In this chapter, we can find the phenomenon of the so-called "Instagram-worthy" fashion, which is introduced along with the concept of entertainment, visibility, as well as their ability to be photographed and, later on, tagged (this is presented on a figure as well); afterwards, we are provided with an insight into the background of influencer culture. A typology is created along distinct concepts for the fashion phenomena appearing on Instagram. Three basic types of Instagram-worthy fashion are distinguished by the author: "(1) entertainment-based, shoppable, and competitive content – shoppable and entertaining Instagram media; (2) slacktivist, call-out-culture-related content that urges

action – activist Instagram media; (3) remixed, viral, trash fashion content – viral Instagram media" (p. 166). The ever-radical changes that have happened in the fashion industry due to the spread of social media platforms are also discussed.

Anna Keszeg wishes to see and show the movements in their entirety, which was successfully carried out with the presented examples. The avant-garde paradigm is emphasized, for it has dominated systemic movements since the 1970s yet started to be questioned in the middle of the 2000s: "Fashion that is fast and is based on quick changes of trends can no longer be labelled as timeless" (p. 205). However, in the case of the social paradigm, material functions have come forth into the spotlight. The author emphasizes that fashion is considered differently in the social subsystems by the challenges that the industry has to face (such as sustainable design concepts). The book is aiming to draw attention to how fashion has become mediatized in the past decades: "Something we have to strongly consider is the movement of the mediatization of fashion: fashion becomes media" (p. 207).

"Fashion is out of fashion" – is an opening sentence that the author has used several times in her lectures. Yet, what future does fashion have? How realistic is the textbook for redesigning? – we arrive at this issue in Anna Keszeg's present-centred book, in which social movements come to the fore through the examination of fashion phenomena. With fast fashion in the past couple of years, the phrase "hyperfast fashion" took off. It is also noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic the presence of the latter concept has become abundantly clear, as it refers to the clothing sector that is specialized in online commerce.

The studies show clear engagement in the topic itself, with years of specialized research, while focusing on being current, which is an enormous challenge for researchers, considering the quick-paced change of trends. In addition, the book published by Metropolitan University of Budapest also features the exciting fashion illustrations of Ágnes Keszeg.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 173–175

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0010

Laura Nistor: Fashion: A Phenomenon of Consumption and Communication. Studies among Youngsters in Romania

Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020

Rozália Klára BAKÓ
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca
bakorozalia@uni.sapientia.ro

This interdisciplinary study is rooted in previous research endeavours of the author and synthesises her PhD thesis on fashion as a complex social phenomenon. While embedded in a thorough literature review with a global scope, the present research is aimed at exploring local and regional fashion-related attitudes and behaviours of youngsters from Central Romania.

Although consumerism and communication are not conceptually connected, they are inseparable in the age of social media when it comes to post-millennials. The interactive web has enabled an unprecedented spread of ideas across all generations, and even more for the digital natives glued to online spaces. This intricate connection between consumerism and communication is presented analytically by Laura Nistor using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Fashion viewed through the lenses of communication processes is a valuable niche approach looking at young people's information sources, brand-related attitudes and narratives through online surveys and focus group discussions. Empirical research was located in three university campuses in Central Romania: a small town (Miercurea Ciuc), a medium-sized town (Târgu-Mureş), and a large city (Cluj-Napoca), encompassing students from two universities: Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Miercurea Ciuc, Târgu-Mureş, and Cluj-Napoca campuses) and Babeş–Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca: the aim of choosing these locations was to ensure a heterogeneous public.

The book has a balanced structure, combining theoretical and empirical analyses, connected by a methodological chapter aimed at bringing transparency to the study. The first part is a theoretical inquiry into the topic of fashion in general and fashion consumption among young people in particular. A thorough literature review is aimed at framing the empirical analysis, starting from the key term "fashion", so often used and abused to define trends in all fields yet mainly

referenced as in relation to clothes. The author remarks the various shades and meanings of fashion as reflected in the terms style, trend, and fad: "Compared to fads, which spread rapidly, fashion develops slower; compared to styles, which are durable over time, fashion does not last over time, while compared to the directional trends fashion is often a less general, more fuzzy phenomenon" (Aspers–Godart 2013: 13).

When theorizing about fashion as a cultural and communicative phenomenon, Nistor highlights the role sense making and identity building play for both individuals and groups, referencing Barthes and Barnard. In order to understand such a complex social reality, we need to analyse both individual and institutional actors' discourses that shape styles, trends, and fads on micro and macro levels. The rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest and the role influencers play in promoting brands, especially fast-fashion ones, contribute to the increasing role communication plays in shaping and spreading clothing and lifestyle trends among post-millennials.

Fashion diffusion is an important element of understanding adoption processes: Nistor references Veblen's top-down approach through the concept of *conspicuous consumption*, Bourdieu's notion of *taste*, and Baudrillard's ideas on the *symbolic role of consumption* – theories instrumental to frame the context of the expanding fast fashion in the age of *instant gratification* (Bauman). However, vertical diffusion theories are not suitable to explain the pace at and the ways in which trends and fads are spreading: instead, horizontal diffusion models of trickle-across theories should be applied. Social media enable such horizontal diffusion and the formation of various lifestyle subcultures at all income levels of society. The latest developments in fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion through Tik-Tok and the spectacular rise of brands like Shein since 2021 confirm Nistor's conclusion on the role of horizontal diffusion.

The second part of the book brings clarity to the research methodology by explaining in detail why and how quantitative and qualitative data collection and interpretation strategies have been used. Online surveys were used to tap into the major fashion-related attitudes and behaviours of the post-millennials under study, well aware of the strengths and limitations of convenience sampling: 305 students from Babeş–Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca and 270 from Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania responded to the questionnaire. As for the fashion-related discourses of the population under study, a number of 11 focus group discussions were conducted between 2016 and 2018 at three locations: Miercurea Ciuc, Târgu-Mureş, and Cluj-Napoca, prepared and analysed by using both inductive and deductive strategies.

The third part of Nistor's book makes the most original contribution to the field of study by presenting in detail the empirical analysis: an online questionnaire applied to the three locations for the two universities and the focus group

discussions aimed at nuancing the results of quantitative analyses, contextualizing discourses about fashion among post-millennials in Central Romania. Socio-economic status is important when it comes to budget yet not decisive in explaining the fashion choices of the youngsters under study. What matters more is location: a large city like Cluj-Napoca is more conducive to brand awareness and fashion-conscious attitudes and behaviours. On a deeper level of analysis carried out through focus group discussions, the study concludes that young people build their fashion "sense and sensibility" as part of a broader lifestyle and individuation ideal. Living on a limited budget is a generational given, shaping consumer behaviours and attitudes: shopping in outlets and thrifting are rather constraints than an environmentally aware attitude. The normative framework of fashion is transcended by expressive endeavours: university students immerse into trends as part of their identity work and lifestyle-related attitudes. However, the unwritten rules of fashion norms are important. Nistor concludes: "This approach reflects a kind of mixture between youngsters' openness towards individual agency and global fashion (e.g. the high popularity of fast-fashion brands) and a form of more traditional lifestyle where they are afraid of being blamed by their community or by their peers for inadequate clothing" (p. 19).

Although very few students seem to follow fashion trends and influencers thoroughly, online spaces are shaping and informing styling choices, shopping habits, and general knowledge about fashion, brands, and lifestyle. A key conclusion of the research is the need to conform to expectations. "In theory, they are against fashion's normativity, but in practice they aim to conform through their outfits to situations, contexts, and groups" (p. 308). There is a duality: on the one hand, youngsters try to find their personal style that makes them feel comfortable and unique, and, on the other hand, they strive to be accepted by their peers and groups of reference, thus bringing conformity to their fashion choices. Fast-fashion brands prevail, and very few respondents proved to go against the mainstream consumerist trends and adopt a minimalist, environmentally aware approach to their clothing and lifestyle.

Laura Nistor's book is a valuable contribution to fashion studies in general and to empirical analyses focused on Romania in particular: her background in environmental, sociological, and communication studies enabled a balanced, critical interdisciplinary approach to the topic of fashion as a consumption phenomenon. A fast-paced, digitalized world makes this topic even more timely and worthwhile to be replicated and enriched: the rise of Tik-Tok and ultra-fast fashion brands, as well as anti-consumerist influencers promoting slow fashion, will bring new research questions to the table.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **12** (2022) 176–181

DOI: 10.2478/aussoc-2022-0011

New Rules of Fashion: "We Must Forget Everything That We Know about the Industry"

Emese DOBOS
Centre for Economic and Regional Studies Institute of World Economics, Budapest, Hungary
Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary
dobos.emese@krtk.hu

Emerging Fashion Capitals, Sustainability, and Female Leadership: A Roundtable Discussion was presented in collaboration with the Hungarian Fashion & Design Agency at the Expo 2020 Dubai, in the Women's Pavilion. Participants Zsófia Bata-Jakab, CEO of the Hungarian Fashion & Design Agency, Camille Boyer, co-founder & creative mind of Austrian Fashion Association, Daria Marusyk, former Head of Communications and Sustainability at Ukrainian Fashion Week and co-founder of the Be Sustainable! Fashion Summit besides Lama Jouni, founder and creative director of Lama Jouni and Emese Dobos as a moderator joined the discussion about the current development within technology, sustainability, regional and gender disruption in fashion. In the following, a short presentation of the event and its main approaches are presented.

Roots of Design – And Success

Historically, the fashion industry is dominated by four "fashion capitals": New York, London, Milan, and Paris. Power and creativity have been concentrated around the "Big 4" since the second half of the 20th century, even if we have witnessed an intensified globalization not just in production but in consumption and the emergence – and proliferation – of numerous fashion weeks around the whole world. But are the Western European and American cities still the cornerstones in the contemporary fashion scene? This question was debated, and one of the conclusions was that "The Big Four" are there and playing an important role. It is a big question for a smaller country as to which direction we should choose. Communication-wise, it is important to have your own fashion week because fashion weeks are part of the country's image making and you invite buyers, influencers, and the media to the country. There are a lot of tourists searching for experiences not just in built heritage but in creative sectors as well. Otherwise,

"from the point of view of sale, it is important for designers to be at the biggest events" – said Zsófia Bata-Jakab, CEO of the Hungarian Fashion & Design Agency, about their strategy, regarding what is better to help designers to get into the biggest fashion capitals or to channel an own event into the fashion weeks' calendar.

Lama Jouni, founder and creative director of Lama Jouni, was born in Lebanon, educated in Paris, and with her brand she is based in Dubai. She acknowledged the role of Dubai in her brand's development. She emphasized that:

> Approximately four years ago, several initiatives stated to support young designers from Syria, Lebanon, and the Emirates. Dubai is all about growth and progress. [Being based in Dubai] Helped me a lot to reach out to an international audience. Dubai is a hub and invites people from all over the world. It makes it easier being located here, it is a very diverse city, and you can introduce your brand to people from all over the world.

Source: HFDA

Picture 1. *Participants of the event*

Thus, according to the participants, today's fashion arena is still defined by the "Big 4", but at the same time it is characterized by more diversity and openness towards fashion designers' rich cultural backgrounds. According to Camille Boyer, co-founder and creative mind of the Austrian Fashion Association:

> Traditional craftsmanship and heritage started to be shown in the work of Austrian designers a few years ago. It became even stronger during the pandemic, as people started to be more interested in regional design and locally produced goods. There are a lot of ways for designers how to be inspired by traditions: it can come from the fabrics for example. The

> raw material loden was part of peasants' clothing: they used it to protect themselves from the cold weather. Now it is presented as a high-end piece. The folklore costume, tracht – which is similar across German-speaking countries –, became also revisited and newly contextualized by a lot of designers (…) We also have graphic design and styles like the Wiener Werkstätte artisan movement that was established at the beginning of the 20th century and was influential in Bauhaus and Art Nouveau. It keeps designers inspired today as well. Designers are repurposing leather pants, the Lederhosen, which is really strong. There are not just tangible goods, but an intangible, conceptual, intellectual approach to fashion. That is the case of Helmut Lang, and there are a lot of young designers who are questioning what ugliness and beauty is. They are the frontiers between art and fashion.

She also added that sustainability in our time is mandatory, and it is a natural desire for designers to know the heritage and contextualize it in a modern way.

Ingredients of International Success in Contemporary Fashion

According to Lama Jouni, fashion schools teach designers patternmaking but not how to run a business. Daria Marusyk, former head of communications and sustainability at Ukrainian Fashion Week and co-founder of Be Sustainable! Fashion Summit, emphasized that the actual context shaped by the pandemic, the global socio-economic insecurity, climate crisis, etc. puts fashion brands in front of new challenges:

> I had to figure it out on my own how to make my brand relevant whatever happens in the world. Sustainability is very important. 2020 made things slow down and gave time to designers to reflect and reinvent their brands to be more sustainable. If you pay attention to what is going on in the world, you can get a global exposure. In this way, it does not matter where you are from. (…) We are in a state when economic and political situation in general, the social agenda in each country and on a global level effects the direct interest of people. Even if the political situation is not the best, the creative industry has a chance to showcase the creative DNA of a country through collections.

The fashion industry undeniably seems to have a regional interest from time to time. Japanese designers enjoyed the buzz during the 1970s in Paris, there was special attention given to post-Soviet aesthetics during the 2010s, and the industry currently turned its attention in the direction of Africa.

> There was hype in fashion around the former Soviet Union states. It turned the spotlight on the situation in those countries in general and that interest can be used as a tool. But designers have to work together with different institutions whose aim is to promote them outside of the country. Let's be honest: marketing and PR are key. A hype around talent without any kind of support is an exception, not a rule. Every talent needs to be supported, and business support needs to be used in a good way. Every designer and brand must bring a new sense to society. Even local context can be understood globally. It must be meaningful.

– told the expert on how to sustain the fashion industry's interest in a certain region. According to her, Ukrainian fashion designers are quite popular on the international fashion scene, and the hype around the post-Soviet states is just one reason. "They are using the tools of PR in a good way. They are super-effective in influencer marketing, but this has been a long way for them. The Ukrainian Fashion Week also played its part in bringing [international] media to Ukraine. Connections are key in the fashion industry."

Zsófia Bata-Jakab also emphasized the role of support. The HFDA offers different levels of mentoring for fashion designers, from fresh students to well-established brands with a special focus on export. "Hungary has so many talents [showcasing, mentoring]. Acting separately is not easy. We believe that collective support is more effective. The Budapest Central European Fashion Week welcomes not just Hungarian designers but is open for the whole region. We have to share our efforts and options" – she claimed.

The Role of Women and Technology in Fashion

Turning to a different aspect within contemporary fashion and society, the participants shared their thoughts on the gender equality and the role of women within the fashion industry. According to several statistics and surveys, most of the customers of fashion are female. Most of the fashion workers are female, and even if there are more and more successful female fashion designers, most of the truly influential executive positions at the top of the industry are held by men. Lama Jouni agrees in that most of the upcoming designers are female, and she does not see any rivalry between them. "I genuinely believe that women now are stronger, and they are taking more chances. They are pushing each other. It is not a competition. We all want to see each other succeed. We hold the future and the industry." Camille Boyer reflected on that and raised the role of motherhood in this case. "In Austria, most of the women in positions don't have children. I am an exception. Austria is a conservative country; women are still supposed to stay

[at home] with their children, and they may work part-time when their children get bigger." According to her, executive positions are connected to stressful work and long working hours – that is also a reason why men have them. "There is still a long way to go till equality and equal pay. We are going in the right direction, but we are still not there" – she continued. Daria Marusyk added that the situation in Ukraine is similar to and different from Austria at the same time. "The country has patriarchal family traditions. But women have children in their early 20s mostly, and after that, they can have a career later. But it is also seen as a good choice if you want to grow up within your family."

Switching to different aspects around the latest issues and developments within fashion, the question as to "how technology is changing the fashion industry now" was raised. Lama Jouni immediately emphasized the role of social media:

> It is a very important aspect of a brand. The right people help the brand grow. Most of our clients are acquired from social media. Most of our retailers reached out to us through our social media channels. During the pandemic, online presence helped the brands to stay alive. The virtual Premiere Vision helped us to find the right supplier for textiles. New technology helps to create sustainable fabrics. And COVID-19 pushed people to reach out to each other virtually.

Camille Boyer has also added that digital transformation is present and done at different levels and agreed with the designer that its role is important in a more sustainable fashion: "Prototyping and sampling fashion pieces and accessories help to reduce waste. There are a lot of ways how to use technology. But it has to be embedded in the whole supply chain, not just in communication. But while the old systems are working, it needs a lot of investment" – she added. Daria Marusyk also sees a huge opportunity in augmented reality collections. "It is about developing our digital, social avatars. My humble opinion is that within some time, half of the fashion industry will be transformed into the Metaverse. Early adopters can be seen now for digital fashion. Digital technology will bring a more sustainable approach to the fashion industry. We need to buy less [physical products]" – she claimed.

Then Zsófia Bata-Jakab pointed out the importance of physical reality besides the virtual world. "As far as I have experienced, physical context is still very important for newcomer designers. It is very hard to see and judge their products for buyers without a real touch. I think business-to-consumers is easier through the Internet, but business-to-business is more difficult online" – she emphasized. She also shared that the pandemic was a critical moment for Hungarian, young designers, as they did not really have a proper web shop, which is the basis of online sales. "We were searching for new options, and we created the Budapest Select Store, with 70

designers. It is not enough to have a web shop. We have also created the alternative reality of the Budapest Select Store where people had the opportunity to check the collection and the latest fashion shows of the designers virtually" – told Zsófia, who also thinks that Metaverse will be a "thing" and a new alternative to us.

Towards Greener Paths?

According to Daria Marusyk, transferring change in the fashion industry lies in the hands of small and medium-sized fashion brands.

> I heard a quote that we have to forget everything what we know about the industry. It should be a blank page. We are overproducing, and the customers are overconsuming. I do not think that it will change within 5, or even 15 years' time. Local designers produce little, for financial reasons or even with a conscious decision, and involve craftsmen and produce locally. They mostly sell directly to clients, and in this way they can promote the idea of sustainability. Sometimes customers have to wait a little bit for a product. We do not wait for anything nowadays. And there is also a new generation of customers who need different things.

Zsófia Bata-Jakab also believes that locality plays a crucial part in sustainability.

> It is also our purpose to bring the information to local consumers that they really have an alternative to fast-fashion brands, and they can choose from local designers. But the media and magazines are playing a big part in spreading the news. We have seen that the pandemic changed customers' attitudes in a good way: people now are searching for local foods and local products. They are searching for more information about what they are buying and try to consciously choose the local options. We know that people are willing to pay for a product if it is made locally and ethically. It is a good start, and the whole industry should follow that approach.

The event *Emerging Fashion Capitals, Sustainability, and Female Leadership: A Roundtable Discussion* thus showed that designers of the contemporary fashion scene around the world have different cultural backgrounds, heritage in fashion, and economic opportunities, which all affect the success of their connection to the mainstream of fashion world. They are also facing similar challenges regarding sustainability, digitalization, and female empowerment. That is why the participants agreed that sharing their efforts, knowledge, and resources is the only way towards the future of fashion design.

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Acta Universitatis Sapientiae
Social Analysis

Sapientia University **Scientia Publishing House**

ISSN 2069-7449
http://www.acta.sapientia.ro

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Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Social Analysis is published once a year, in November.

Contact address and subscription:
Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Social Analysis
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania
RO 400112 Cluj-Napoca, Romania, str. Matei Corvin nr. 4.
Email: acta-social@acta.sapientia.ro
nistorlaura@uni.sapientia.ro

Printed by F&F INTERNATIONAL
Director: Enikő Ambrus

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