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SUSTAINABLE DIFFERENTIATION MODEL FOR FASHION BRANDS

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Differentiation, Branding, Fashion, Strategy, Communication, Design.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Fashion is a complex discipline made up of the interconnection of multidisciplinary nature, comprising: design in both two and three dimensions, textile development, old and new technologies, craftsmanship and artisan skills, business and production, marketing, promotion and consumption, global economics, material and visual culture, history, social anthropology, among others. On one hand, fashion represents the top of a commodity-driven industry, and on the other it is also a vital component of social interaction and industry driver.

Fashion usually generates contradictions between desire and consumption versus the concept of ecological and sustainability that is preeminent in today's lives.

The unique nature of the fashion industry, with its speed to market and responsive methods of production has led design, as a discipline, to represent not only the final aesthetics, but also incorporate a fundamental role in the new concepts of fashion within a sustainable and friendly world. It is in fact an inherent characteristic to fashion brands that should hold an increasing importance in resolving fundamental issues, personal, financial, social, and environmental needs whilst satisfying the innate desire for novelty and delight.

The process of brand building is as efficient as the strategic definition that orientates and structures that implementation. Within the last years, we have been surrounded by strong movements of change that have led to significant changes in the fashion business and competitors. New paradigms have arisen that have influenced the values proposed by brands, the type of products developed, ways of communication as well as selection and buying criteria.

The market changes we have witnessed forced brands to repositioned themselves and expand their businesses

to new markets. It is necessary to establish an integrated communication logic that defines methodologies and manages the processes of design – through the intersection of technical and creative sectors, providing a competitive advantage/ added value.

The main goal of the research project is to define a sustainable differentiation model for fashion brands, one strategic enough to implement the brand characteristics. Whether we are dealing with a start from scratch brand or with the repositioning of existing brands, the nature of the elements studied provides a categorization and presentation of possibilities of applying to each case.

With this in mind, throughout the research project, an analysis has been done to the new paradigms and a model of the differentiation elements has been defined, according to its nature and relevance in the buying decisions. These elements are supported by the research and analysis of fashion brands launched in the market between 2000 and the current year. We also intend to define what elements of image and communication hold sustainability within the brands differentiation and market positioning.

Our goal is to structure a differentiation model for fashion brands that reduces the market risk when launching a product and at the same time increases sustainable potential in a medium/ long term. Therefore, regardless the existing resources (micro, small, medium or large) or the nature of the brand (regional, national, international or global) companies will be able to use the model according to their brand strategies and following a dynamic market approach.

The project uses a qualitative methodology of study and is made up of 4 distinct phases.

On a first phase we conducted a theoretical revision of the concepts studied through existing literature, based on the collection of information from an extensive research on books; articles published both in journals and on the internet and information presented on various



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websites related to the main subjects of analysis. The main goal was to identify theories and empiric studies about the fashion industry.

This research has focused on two major topics: brand concept and consumer regarding their buying decisions and preferences towards lifestyle and personal expressions; brand creation, differentiation and strategic development. We have intended to identify the brand as a differentiation aspect and consequent added value, by the identification of the main creation and communication strategies for brands related to fashion goods.

On the second phase, an empiric study was conducted focusing the differentiation characteristics of fashion brands. To do so, a research was conducted through the main differentiation elements of well position brands and identified the differentiation aspects that allowed their success when launching. This crossed analyses of global brands has led to a specific characterization of each of its elements. Through the study of these elements, it was possible to define to what extension the brands have reached market implementation. These elements – or differentiation aspects – were structured in a model according to their nature, offering a perspective of the application possibilities in each case.

The perception and understanding of the evolution by these differentiation elements within the brands, have allowed for a categorization of the aspects in 3 categories: nuclear (to hold or adapt to new market conditions); competition through differentiation (developed according to market competitors offer) and creation of competitive advantages (main brand sustainable elements creation through time)

After a thorough analyses of documentation, observation, questionnaires and interviews and content analyses, a case study of 2 fashion brands was conducted with the goal of defining to what extend the differentiation aspects have an influence on market performance. The brands selected were mainly Nordic and Brazilian brands, due to the fact that they hold consistent differentiation vectors and have witness a growing notoriety in the international markets according to the new paradigms that now guide the fashion business.

Following this phase, a sustainable differentiation

model for fashion brands will be drawn. This will be tested by a group of fashion companies holding brands that will incorporate the model.

The forth and last phase of the project will be the drawn of all conclusions that summarize the research conducted.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ANA RONCHA was born in Porto, Portugal in 1980. Holds a Degree in Communication Design by Faculty of Fine Arts (Porto) and is currently a PhD student in Design and Management at University of Minho, Portugal. Has been enrolled in seminars, lectures and workshops at

London College of Fashion (London), Central Saint Martins (London), Fashion Institute of Technology (NY) and Parson's School of Design (NY). Has also studied at Politecnico di Milano (Milan) with a specialization in Fashion Communication.

Has worked in companies such as: Base Design (New York), RMAC (Lisbon), Lisbon Fashion Week and Salsa Jeans and has published works in several books, magazines and journals.

Has published articles in "Journal of Brand Management" and has presented papers at "Connected 2010 – 2nd International Conference in Design Education – Sydney Australia", "CIPED – Congresso Internacional de Pesquisa em Design – Lisbon, Portugal" and "The Tao of Sustainability – Beijing, China"

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