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Fashion, Communication, and Consumerism

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Fashion, Communication, and Consumerism

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Abstract

The fashion industry is a 1.2 trillion dollar global market, with more than 250 billion dollars spent each year in the United States alone. With over 4 million individuals employed in the United States it takes a village to distribute, sell, and communicate apparel across the world. A large portion of the fashion industry functions ~~is fueled~~ with the help of sales associates. Businesses would not be able to function without design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, advertising, communication, buying, planning, and consulting. In a global market where communication, social media, and image are quickly changing, the retail environment is promoting functionality of fashion throughout the world. The notion of fashion as communication is constantly evolving as the ~~customers~~customers needs and wants continue to develop and expectations grow increasingly higher. ~~Fashion can be defined as a~~The definition of fashion is a "popular trend, especially in styles of dress and ornament or manners of behavior" (Merriam Webster). Individuals communicate messages through their clothing choices. In fact, Women's Wear Daily writes, "~~fashion~~Fashion is most often used as a synonym for the current style in clothing, however sociologists and other scholars who write about fashion are likely…to [share] that fashion has two elements".[1] These messages can convey a religion, the socio-economic group the individual belongs too, a profession, and even a sports team in which they support. This project will be focusing and answering the

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[1] 2017). Fashion Dictionary. *WWD.* http://wwd.com/fashion-dictionary/.

question: "In what ways do ~~individual's~~individuals communicate through fashion?" The fashion industry is more influential than ever before. As a result, messages can be uncovered and judgments are often made based on a fashion decision.

My findings throughout my research were not surprising. In fact, if anything the influence that social media and the affect that branding has on communication today is more profound than I could have imagined. Today, we are constantly judging others based on their verbal communication, actions be it physical or nonverbal, and of course our appearance. While many individuals take fashion influence from celebrities and idolized models, others are able to take beauty and fashion advice from prominent bloggers and social influencers who connect with followers on an individual and "real" level.

In this paper, I will discuss the way that fashion has evolved as technology and communication methods rapidly evolve. I will also be looking at the evolution of fashion from its birth to the influence that runway shows have on society today. Lastly, I will focus on the changing landscape of fashion as communication and the challenges that retail entities face. Fashion has always and will always be used as a form of communication.

Executive Summary

For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated with the complexity of clothes in both an abstract meaning as well as the simplicity behind the act of wearing clothing each day. In fact, from a young age I discovered the importance of dressing to impress with the help of my school's dress code. As I look back at my fashion evolution, I have always added my own flare to each outfit while keeping up with the trends of the season. This project was developed, as a result, of the variety of internships that I have attained throughout college. When I first entered college as Communication and Rhetorical Studies ~~major~~major, I had my ~~sites~~sights set on going into Public Relations for a major fashion house. However, after interning at alice + olivia in the PR department I realized that while clothes were what kept me fascinated with the industry, PR did not fulfill my wants and needs that I was expecting in a career. The following summer I interned at Theory in the Retail Operations and Communications Department – where I discovered my love for numbers and patterns relating to sales trends and foot traffic throughout stores. After applying to many different ~~wholesale retailers~~retailers, I was one of five chosen to intern at Bergdorf Goodman in the buying department – one of the most prestigious retailers in the global market.

Fashion has been evolving with the seasons since the beginning of time. While the complexity to each article has become more intricate, the basic need and functionality for clothes has remained ~~in tact~~intact. As fashion continues to progress, ~~so~~so have technology, varying ideological views, and the economy.

However as our society continues to progress, our communication method through fashion remains the same. Both nonverbal and verbal communication remains a key aspect in our lives today. Fashion can expose a team or home city that someone is from, can uncover if they are in a sorority or fraternity on campus, and can even disclose what religion or ethnic group an individual belongs to. As a result, I am extremely interested in learning more about how fashion contributes to our daily communication.

Throughout this ~~study~~study, I will be examining different trends in the market space. Exploring these trends will help me uncover more about the history and future of fashion as communication. Furthermore, I will be performing intricate research into social media bloggers and influencers that work to communicate a brand's message to potential customers. Lastly, I will be studying the current trends when it comes to brick and mortar stores. The ultimate goal of this project is to learn about the history of the fashion industry, the trends that continue to propel it into the future, and the impact that social media and technology has had on the industry.

Chapter 1: The Fashion Industry

Introduction

Fashion is a part of our everyday life. Each morning when we wake ~~up~~up, we subconsciously make a decision to dress a certain way. These decisions are made while thinking about our daily schedule, the image we want to present to the world, and how comfortable we feel in our own skin. Fashion is often looked at as a definition that has two elements. Women's Wear Daily defines fashion as an element that "is accepted by many people and its acceptance lasts for a relatively short period of time. Fashion does not exist in all cultures and historic periods". [2] When we make our fashion ~~decisions~~decisions, we are choosing to communicate a message and are using fashion as a nonverbal way of communicating. Robert Losee from the University of North Carolina shares that communication can be defined as an interaction that is "characterized by information transfer, [or] processing [that] takes place in communication systems [where] both the sender and receiver are actively involved in a communication system, and the quality of communication varies".[3] So what happens when we look at fashion as communication? ~~Essentially~~Essentially, ~~,~~ when ~~we~~ fashion ~~view~~ is viewed as communication. the clothing choices ~~previously~~ made answer the exchange of many questions that the

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[2] (2017). Fashion Dictionary. *WWD.* http://wwd.com/fashion-dictionary/.
[3] Losee, R. (1999). Communication Defined as Complementary Informative Processes. *Journal of Information, Communication, and Library Science.* *https://ils.unc.edu/~losee/ci/node3.html*

other individual may have but is not prepared to ~~verbally~~ address. In essence, fashion is communicating questions that may not be appropriate to ask ~~but instead the answers are shared~~<u>but instead are shared</u> in a nonverbal format. Fashion is not only about self-expression but <u>it</u> is also about announcing yourself to the public<u>,</u> ~~and~~ <u>as well as,</u> how you see yourself in ~~relation~~<u>relation</u> to those who surround you.

The fashion industry is a 1.2 trillion dollar global market, with more than 250 billion dollars spent each year in the United States alone. With over 4 million individuals employed in the United States it takes a village to distribute, sell, and communicate apparel across the world. A large portion of the fashion industry <u>functions</u> ~~is fueled~~ with the help of sales associates. Businesses would not be able to function without design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, advertising, communication, buying, planning, and consulting. In a global market where communication, social media, and image are quickly changing, the retail environment is promoting functionality of fashion throughout the world. In the past, advertisements put forth by brands were ~~viewed as~~ extremely influential over a customer base~~.,~~ ~~h~~<u>H</u>owever, today social media influencers and bloggers equally as influential. Brand strategies stretch far beyond creating a dialogue for fashion decisions, they used in creating a conversation for clothing to speak with the customer both on and off the rack. In fact, brand image is a large component to the success of these influencers and often times help convey a brand's message to the public.

I am interested in answering the question "In what way's do individual's communicate through fashion?" Answering this question through a broader lens will

help to understand the global market and the different fashion decisions across the world. Fashion has many different ~~facets and the intended purpose of this Capstone is to uncover how~~facets, the intended purpose of this Capstone is to uncover how, and why we, as a society, function and communicate through our fashion choices that we make.

Background Information

Society is home to a variety of different social classes, religions, races, morals, and values. As a result, the fashion needs of customers globally continue to evolve. Each store and brand looks ~~is built~~ to target a different segment of the market in order to provide and cater to as many individuals as possible. While the designers often decide the vision behind the brand, price point, and target audience, ultimately the message that is being communicated is shared with the help of PR, marketing, and most importantly the corporate buyers. Without the support of these buyers, the customers may not perceive the message in a positive light and therefore not believe in the product.

For example, Macy's is a large department store that has over 700 stores. Founded in 1858, the corporation has~~The corporation was founded in 1858 and has~~ worked hard to stay true to its core values. Macy's continues to bring fair and attainable prices to articles of clothing that are on trend. Through the help of the PR team, Macy's is able to handle customer complaints or accusations against the brand in a timely manner. This helps each store maintain a positive communication message with its customers. The marketing team is able to look at the fashion trends

of each season and relay the correct messaging between brands and clients. The

corporate buyers are individuals who help convey the correct messaging. ~~out~~

~~through picking the clothing that is sold at Macy's.~~ When these corporate positions

work ~~together~~together, Macy's is able to reach their target audience and

communicate fair pricing ~~whether it is~~either through sales or through ~~even~~

promotions.

While most brick and mortar stores follow the same organizational structure,

each store is reaching a different target market and is relaying different

communication messages. For example, Neiman Marcus is a high-end retail store

that does not often offer many sales, but instead is hoping to reach a client that is of

the upper class and has an appreciation for finer fashion trends. Overall, each store

is looking to communicate the correct messaging to clients that align with their

brand message, as well as, the designer's beliefs that they carry in store.

Buying is a role that studies and understands the company's customer in

order to have the most productive sales season. According to the Society for Human

Resource Management, "a buyer/planner is responsible for source selection and

procurement functions directly associated with the company's needs for indirect

materials and services, fixed assets and tooling, and select production materials and

services". [4] Analysis of color, cut, and size is a key part to making a buy. In fact,

without this analysis a buyer would be buying the collection for himself or herself

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[4] (2017). Buyer/Planner. *Society for Human Resource Management.*
https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/job-
descriptions/pages/cms_001159.aspx.

instead of catering to the customer. In addition, it is important to consider how the clothes communicate with the client and the type of message that each article sends both on the hanger and off. Furthermore, with the growth of Omni Sales, also known as online shopping, buyers are focusing ~~are focused~~ on colors and cuts that will show well on a website instead of in person. Often times, higher end clothing is ~~sold~~ purchased with the importance of ~~the~~ touch and feel of the ~~material which~~material. This ~~is~~ messaging is difficult to translate online ~~a website~~. The shift from brick and mortar to Omni has changed the way that stores think about their selection each season. Instead of solely being concerned with what the consumer is interested in purchasing – stores are now focused on what colors will be bought for in-store versus online, how well pictures will photograph the detail, and what digital platforms will sell each article.

Each store whether it is Omni or brick and mortar has a core customer, in addition to a target customer that they are hoping to turn into a loyal client. As previously stated, every organization offers a variety of price points, clothing trends, and experiences while shopping in store or online. In addition, there is a variety of ways to shop the trends either through a vendor, which is direct to consumer, or through a wholesaler – known to the public as department stores. While each channel provides the same pricing, the variation throughout collections vary depending on the means of the purchase.~~s and messages conveyed is shifted depending on the outlet it is perceived and purchased through.~~

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Macy's is not only acknowledged as ~~Macy's is known as~~ America's department store~~,~~ ~~and~~ but the organization is recognized as a reasonably priced brick and mortar destination. Neiman Marcus and Bergdorf Goodman on the other hand~~,~~ ~~are known~~have a reputation as being the "pinnacle of luxury". These two wholesalers are home to high-end luxury brands that most individuals only dream of one day purchasing. However, all three of these department stores carry some of the same designers – one being Michael Kors. A buyer's job is to uncover the pieces that communicate the brands' message, as well as, ensure that it stays in line with the expectations of the core client. As a result, a Michael Kors dress that may be purchased at a Macy's is most likely going to be from a different collection and price point that may be purchased at Neiman Marcus and Bergdorf Goodman. This adds another dimension to fashion as communication. Not only does brand image communicate messages about the customer, but it also shows ~~where~~how clothing can communicate information about the client's background and economic standing. ~~the clothing is purchased communicates the same information about the client's background, beliefs, and economic standing.~~

Struggle in Retail

The economy in the United States differs from the global economy because we are a society that believes and promotes a sales climate. Essentially, as the modern customer continues to move forward the more "deal oriented" she becomes. As a result, many retailers are struggling because the customer is aware that a sale will be available in the upcoming months ~~that there is always a deal or sale that will~~

~~be available in the near future~~. In addition, the availability of online retailers that provide steep discounts on products are ~~extremely~~ prevalent in the market space today. According to Forbes, TJ Maxx experienced a sharp increase in sales in their first quarter of 2016. "Clearly there is a market share shift underway with some traditional stores losing like department stores (Macy's, Kohl's, ~~J.C~~and J.C. Penny) and specialty stores (Gap), while more aggressive, promotional formats in the United States are winning."[5] Stores <u>face challenges</u> ~~are challenged~~ to understand the client's expectations even in this ever-evolving sales environment. While, the consumer may be interested in a particular item, they now understand the market well enough to shop around and find the "best deal". As a result, off-price markets are souring – especially when designer brands are ~~being~~ offered at a discounted price. This is a direct result of individuals trying to <u>perceive themselves</u> ~~be perceived~~ in a particular way, <u>even if they do not have the means for the intended image.</u>

~~but they may not have the money to support his or her intended image.~~

However, the majority of the global market does not function on a "sales" model. For example, in France<u>, the government allows only two nationwide sales periods per year.</u> ~~there are only two nationwide sales periods that are determined by the central administration.~~[6] This occurs during the middle of the winter (*Soldes*

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[5] Loeb, W. (2016). TJX's Strong Earning Show Struggling Retail Sector How to Get it Right. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/walterloeb/2016/05/18/tjx-is-jubilant-with-great-first-quarter-results/#66dd09da237f .

[6] Davis, S. (2016). Sales Season in France! Les Soldes Have New Dates. *French Entrée*. https://www.frenchentree.com/news/les-soldes-sales-season-in-france/.

D'hiver or Winter Sales*)* in January and February and again during the summer (*Soldes D'été* or Summer Sales), which takes place in June and July. Each store is given a definitive start date that is identical across the country, however, the ending of each is sale is more flexible depending on the designer and inventory that is left. This affects the way retail functions in other climates. With other ~~countries~~countries, individuals who are sporting high-end fashion most likely paid in full for the clothes – showing off their wealth and fashion sensibility.

As shopping habits shift and Omni continues to gain a large share in the market, many retailers who are used to a large amount of foot-traffic are working on re-adjusting their business model to cater to the less traditional client. "Even as stores typically on solid footing, including Macy's and Nordstrom, have scrambled to keep up with the shift in shopping habits, they're finding it difficult to maintain an edge"[7]. As a result, Macy's has taken the initiative to close 100 storefronts in order to re-direct the focus of the business onto online and their top performing doors. As retail continues to struggle, customers are taking charge of their purchasing journey and shopping experience. In fact, stores are losing control of the customers needing them and instead the stores are chasing the consumer.

Technology is a large growing area for retail; however, it is causing many retailers unnecessary headaches. Millennials are individuals born between the years of 1984 and 2004. They are a generation of individuals who adapt quickly to

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[7] Malcom, H. (2016). These 5 Retailers are Suffering in a Changing Retail World. *USA Today.* http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2016/01/10/five-companies-suffering-amid-changing-retail-world/78422712/.

technology, are constantly socializing be it in person or online, and like to collaborate and communicate as a form of branding.[8] As a result, millennials are partially to blame for the ever-changing retail space. As this generation continues to grow and join the ~~workface~~workface, they are attached to their phones, appreciate the feeling of constant gratification, are price sensitive, and move at a faster pace than ever before[9]. In addition, while shopping they like to find incentives to shop in a certain location rather than being a loyal customer. With the face of retail changing constantly, brick-and-mortar stores are more inclined to create an experience in order to maintain the foot traffic they expect to achieve. Without these shopping "~~experiences~~experiences", many millennials will continue to shop for the next best sale – causing a loss in potential profit. Retailers are struggling to share and communicate the experience that customers yearn for. The communication shared is more than the experience of shopping in-store; it is also about spreading the brand message in order to continue to drive sales.

Social Media and Fashion

Social media is a form of communication that continues to grow each year. This digital landscape has not only effected retail; but has changed the way that news is shared, it has altered the way that individuals find employment, and has

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[8] Solomon, M. (2014). 2015 is the Year of the Millennial Customer: 5 Key Traits These 80 Million Customers Share. *Forbes.* https://www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2014/12/29/5-traits-that-define-the-80-million-millennial-customers-coming-your-way/#78c785aa25e5.

[9] Gasca, P. (2015). 8 Shopping Habits of Millennials All Retailers Need to Know About". *Entrepreneur.* https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/253582.

transformed communication. Today, people have access to almost anything at the touch of their phone, tablet, or computer. As a result, we are glued to our phones more than ever before and often times are absent-mindedness. Social media is buying into this trend and changing conventional means of brand advertisement. ~~Social media is often defined~~The definition of social media is ~~as~~ a "collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration."[10] Social media can spread both positive and negative ideas. ~~is used in collaboration with a variety of different platforms to spread either positive or negative ideals.~~

One of the first successful social media platforms, Facebook, ~~was~~ launched in February 2004 as a social networking service that ~~was made~~was only accessible to Ivy League students. The goal was to connect individuals throughout campus to create a smaller community during what can be an overwhelming four years. As Facebook gained momentum, it began to spread throughout other campuses and eventually other age groups. During this ~~time~~time, the potential for all social media platforms and blogs were endless and market share ~~was shortly gained~~grew shortly after. With the development of Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat individuals are capable of ~~were developed~~ to post~~ing~~ 140 character statements, shar~~ing~~e pictures and inspirational messages, and ~~curate~~ curating short snippets of daily routines. Ultimately, certain accounts and individuals started developing a loyal following forcing organizations to re-evaluate methods of branding,

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[10] Rouse, M. (2013). What is Social Media? *Tech Target: What Is?*. http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media .

advertising, and communicating a deeper message. Previously, consumers were watching and idolizing models that had bodies that people only dreamed of; models also wore clothes that were sold at price points that were not attainable to the average individual. As social media gained a presence, bloggers became relatable figures in the industry as individuals who were capable of conveying positive brand messaging. "[Bloggers] help the average person understand how high fashion is applicable to them…People see those gorgeous clothes on the runway, but they are never going to be able to buy a dress that is $3,000. [The blogs] help show women how they can apply high fashion their daily wardrobe." [11] Influencers across the industry have transformed their media outlets into lifestyle platforms to better connect and communicate with their loyal followings.

The influence that is communicated spreads far beyond social media outlets. While physical magazines are in the process of becoming extinct, the inspiration that ~~is shared through the~~ editors share with the world is stronger than ever before. For example, Anna Wintour has been the editor-in-chief of *Vogue* since 1988. She is recognized as the most powerful individual in fashion, and as a result, Wintour's reputation expands far beyond that of a "typical" editor-in-chief. ~~and she is referred to as the most powerful individual in fashion.~~ Her power extends far beyond ensuring that *Vogue* is produced and published in a timely manner. Wintour has

[11] Bourne, L. (2010). The Rise of the Style Blogger. *Forbes.* http://www.forbes.com/2010/02/12/fashion-blogger-clothes-forbes-woman-style-shopping.html.

"control over every aspect of the magazine's content" [12] and is the driving force behind the fashion industry. Without her influence, the messages communicated through fashion would be perceived differently, as would the power of social media. The driving force behind Wintour's success is one that ~~could have never been~~was never expected or foreshadowed ~~foreshadowed or expected~~. Social media has changed the face of branding. The power behind fashion trends is no longer in the hands of brands and stores. Today, individuals who represent the designer complete the execution of the brand's vision. ~~Power has been released from brands and stores and put in the hands of individuals who do not work directly for the brand, but instead represent the designer when hired.~~ This is why the claim that Wintour is the most powerful person in fashion is so profound. Weiss writes, "Because the claim that the most powerful person in an industry is not one of its leading manufacturers, retailers, or designers but is instead the editor-in-chief of a magazine devoted to (supposedly) merely reporting on and critiquing that industry is rather unusual, if not unique" [13]. Technology has propelled the communication of fashion forward in the market and more specifically in the media.

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[12] Weiss, D. (2014). That's Part of What We do: The Performative Power of *Vogue's* Anna Wintour. http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1cdcae7c-ae80-45bc-9875-4fb1558ba269%40sessionmgr4006&vid=1&hid=4210.
[13] Weiss, D. (2014). That's Part of What We do: The Performative Power of *Vogue's* Anna Wintour. http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1cdcae7c-ae80-45bc-9875-4fb1558ba269%40sessionmgr4006&vid=1&hid=4210.

Creating the Retail Experience

In order to stand out from other retailers, brick-and-mortar stores have started to implement and use technology in their physical locations to ensure a seamless shopping experience. More specifically, higher-end retailers are struggling to remain afloat because they do not have as many promotions as the current customer would like. As a result, retailers like Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Barney's New York are working towards creating shopping trips that are meaningful ~~in~~to ensure they have an ~~order to not lose~~ ~~leverage~~advantage in the market space. These "experiences" can range from personal shopping to insider rewards to even using a memory mirror once in-store. All of these initiatives are to help create interactive visits to the store and continue to stand out from competitors. In addition, these experiences and personal attention are aspects to shopping that ~~cannot be achieved~~is unachievable by shopping online. Business insider writes, "According to a Synchrony Financial study, 30% of people surveyed have bought after seeing it on social media. A strong social media presence helps ensure that brands stay connected to their consumers and, in turn, drive sales both online and offline."[14] While retailers are enthusiastic about the rise in Omni sales, concern for losing the in-store customer continues to rise. With the use of social media, brands are investing heavily into the future of brick-and-mortar. As these

[14] "5 Ways Technology is Revolutionizing the Way We Shop". 28 October 2015. http://www.businessinsider.com/sc/technology-changing-the-in-store-retail-experience-2015-10

stores continue to change the retail ~~environment~~environment, it is important that they continue to communicate the correct messaging to the correct client.

Chapter 2: Evolution of Fashion

Fashion as Functionality

~~The development of clothing was originally for the~~Clothing was first ~~developed as a~~ use ~~for~~ of function and function alone. Developed to keep the body protected from the elements, clothing was ~~worn~~ used to help shield the skin from disease and with hopes to survive natural disasters. The development of cloth helped to shield the body, however, as society progressed ~~it was later developed cloth showed~~ to show modesty in relation to society, and eventually ~~to show~~showed ranking and status amongst civilization. For example, in ancient Rome the highest of officials would use purple trim on their white togas. While this was more expensive, it also showed their status and importance in society. This form of fashion and hierarchy was something that ~~could not~~must be observed ~~be overlooked or overthrown~~. Lace and embroidery continued to influence royal families through the time of the industrial revolution. At this ~~point~~point, it became easier and less costly for individuals to purchase "nicer" clothing. Traditional garments are still relevant throughout the world today, and are a way to ~~nonverbally~~ announce your faith and family background through conventional coverings.

ERA: 1900-2000

Many individuals view the recognition of fashion to have simultaneously started developing, as cities became prevalent in the early twentieth century. O~~;~~ ~~o~~thers believe true fashion trends were not acknowledged until the 1970s'. The 70s proved to be the decade that styles from previous eras were being recycled with the

help of modern technology. While industries developed and machines ~~were~~ became ~~made~~ accessible to different socio-economic classes, fashion rapidly started to grow into the powerhouses that we know today. With the development of sewing machines and machine-made textiles – ready-to-wear pieces played important roles in changing ordinary lives from 1900 – 2000. While machinery continued to improve the methods of distribution, the retail environment shifted as economic and social norms grew.

Through the development of the modern world, fashionable every day dress changed in a permanent and even methodical way. Soon enough retailers were looking past the fashion and look of each item, and started studying what would sell and how their customers would appreciate each clothing article.

> "Some scholars, such as Angela McRobbie, have reassessed fashion's multiplicity and the recirculation of styles since the 1970's while other have shown that one person's "everyday" is part of another's fashion statement. However, a predominant interest remains in the fashion "syntaxes" of the young, the novelty of the "look," and the currency of the latest style—whether recycled, second-hand, revivalist, or new"(page 19).[15]

McRobbie believes that each person's individual "everyday" look is subjective and temporary. She believes this is dependent on one's economic standing and the importance of their fashion appearances. As the postmodern era continued to

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[15] Clark, H and Buckley, C. (2012). *Conceptualizing Fashion in Fashion in Everyday Lives.*

develop, the relationship between fashion and modernity could ~~no~~ no longer ~~longer~~ be ignored. Money, means, and resources started to go hand in hand with fashion statements.

Over the past twenty ~~years~~years, fashion trends have become more attainable for low- income individuals. The development of Forever 21 in the United States and Primark in Britain has helped these consumers routinely change up their wardrobe while being up to date with the latest trends. The majority of ~~the articles of~~ clothing sold at stores similar to these are cheap and ~~,~~poor quality imitations of designer and high-end fashion that ~~is shown~~displayed on the runways each season. While the majority of individuals will not be able to tell the difference unless they are looking at the tag ~~is being looked at~~, members of the fashion community are reading these clothes as a form of nonverbal communication. In addition, many people are fascinated with haptic experiences that ~~cannot be provided through~~ knock-off brands cannot provide.

> "Modern city points to an "everyday modernity" shaped by "feel" and "touch," as well as by the visual. Indeed, if touch and feel are as indicative of everyday modernity as seeing, consider the physical, tactile sensation of wearing rayon (artificial or every woman's silk) in 1930s' London and New York."[16]

As communication and buying power continues to develop through online and in-store channels, the importance of materials used remains extremely high.

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[16] Clark, H and Buckley, C. (2012). *Conceptualizing Fashion in Fashion in Everyday Lives.*

Communicating the tangible feeling of ~~these articles of~~ clothing is harder to do, as the future of brick and mortar ~~is called into question~~is unknown. While materials are important to some fashion critics, others believe that ~~with~~as the complexity and beauty of the materials strengthen ~~that~~fashion can no longer be used in an "everyday" manner.

Post Modernism

The mid 1970's were a decade when fashion designers started looking towards the past for ideas for each of their collections. Trends are often found and developed ~~as a result~~as a result of a repurposed ~~inspiration that is being repurposed~~inspiration. Alex Rosenbaum, a junior fashion design major at Syracuse University shared, "Trends are made from inspiration that is repurposed. Postmodernism is the separation of the signified and the signifier, meaning when an object loses its culturally assigned meaning it is redefined". An example she shared with me was the use of riding pants. Someone at some point designed riding pants to help making riding a horse easier – this would be the function. However, someone eventually took those pants and started to wear them for fashion. In this instance form over function is developed. Our lifestyles work in relation with innovation as the style. The next trend's to be developed will be in the fabric that is culturally in demand.

Chapter 3: Trends

Hipster Culture and its Impact on Fashion

The Hipster Culture developed around 1999 as a visible subculture but died after 10 short years in 2009. Hipsters emerged from the youth culture of the late 90's. Founded ~~off of~~off the belief of rejecting consumerism and instead accepting alternative trends that allowed hipsters to stand out and be "different". The trend grew as music and fashion developed as a social source and worked hand in hand with emerging trends. People across cultures are continuously re-evaluating and making changes to what is "in". Hipsters, however, prefer to stay ahead of these modifications. Fashion is a way that an individual can announce to society who they think they are and how they believe they will best connect with others.

Younger individuals became deeply involved in the urban cultures in which they have developed alternative views to both fashion and social trends. Hipsters are ~~often~~ known to quickly dismiss and not engage in trends that others see as "cool". Often times they think that these trends are shallow, boring, and too conducive to society norms. ~~Instead~~Instead, they prefer to focus on being an individual and accepting their truest form of their own authenticity. A hipster from Berlin, Germany states…

"I don't follow specific styles because I think everybody has their own individual style, and one finds it or doesn't. Many, especially in Berlin, are walking around very fashionable, but I think they don't have a style because

they simply wear what everybody here wears. And I almost can't look at it

anymore"[17]

Hipsters do not believe in brand image or brand advertising. In fact, they believe in

the opposite of trends as they deem designer fashion and popular music to cause

individuals to lose authenticity and themselves in the trends. While talking with

Rosenbaum also stated, "Based on the idea of fashion "tribes", what can truly be

considered originally style in the age of social media anyways?" Her views closely

connect to the hipster from Berlin. Rosenbaum believes that we as a society are

constantly feeding ~~off of~~off each other for new and creative ideas. As a result, are

hipsters just like everyone else?

The styles and morals that hipsters follow avidly emerge from not only

personality traits but also social standing and individual life experiences. They are

not looking at the social hierarchy of society, but instead are searching to find

comfort in who they are as an individual. As a result, as something becomes the

"popular", Hipsters are the first to divert away and look for fashion and clothing that

would set them apart from cultural norms. Some researchers even argue that

because they try to be different they are clumped into a culture norm that is now

identified as "hipsters". "Especially people who seem trendy themselves, being early

adopters or trendsetters, tend to be discarded for being shallow and fake, or

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[17] Michael, J. (2015). It's Really Not Hip to be a Hipster: Negotiating Trends and Authenticity in the Cultural Field. *Journal of Consumer Culture.* http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1469540513493206.

inauthentic".[18] However, hipsters are inauthentic because as they look to be different and discover the next big trends they allow others to catch on and make trends bigger than ~~they~~ their original intention~~ever were intended to be~~. Many hipsters claim that the need for prestige and recognition is ~~claimed to be~~ unnecessary, but in ~~reality~~reality, trends often match those of hipster dressing. In conclusion, as hipsters look to be different they end up standing out for a chosen reason. Others also argue that hipsters actually choose to be different for the sake of drawing attention to themselves for going against trends.

Trend Forecasting

Trend forecasting has become one of the most important facets of the modern day fashion industry. This holistic process focuses on attracting customers, while allowing designers to grow their brands~~This is a holistic process that focuses on attracting consumers, while helping designers continue to grow their brands in~~ relation to new trends. Predictions are made ~~about~~ over what will be popular in the next three years. While trend forecasting has become an extremely beneficial area of the industry, it is ~~also~~ regarded and thought of in a controversial way. Some individuals argue that this is enabling designers to be solely interested in profit and not the art behind the fashion. It enables brands to be placed on an even playing field causing for less innovation and diversity in each season.

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[18] "It's really not Hip to be a Hipster: Negotiating Trends and Authenticity in the Cultural Field".

Trend forecasting has been around since the 60s and ~~70s,~~70s; however, the function of forecasters is changing. Today forecasters are looking towards finding communication messaging that connects each fashion season together to further tell a story. These narratives discuss a variety of communication messages from the pricing of a product to what values a ~~are being revealed through a~~ graphic t-shirt reveals. These stories can relate to the political climate, ~~what is being advocated~~trends in society ~~for in society~~, and ~~ways to stand up to~~ social injustices. In a New York Times article, Helen Job, a professor at the Parsons School for Design stated, "You become a translator, looking at cultural signposts and connecting things that appear to be disparate but aren't". [19] The trend merchandising area requires a great deal of intuition and buyer's relations to society with an understanding of current news around the world.

When looking towards the future of fashion ~~eco friendly~~eco-friendly textiles is something that brands are working towards implementing. The use of ~~eco friendly~~eco-friendly textiles communicates messaging with clients that brands are socially involved with concerns around the globe. Furthermore, the technology behind the "ingredients" in clothing is vastly regarded as an important factor to price and sustainability of garments. While the growth of fast-fashion is inevitable, eco-friendly textiles are a way to ensure that there is a smaller amount of waste ~~being~~ produced.

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[19] Zimmerman, E. (2008) "Roaming the World, Detecting Fashion". *New York Times.*

Many people often say that imitation is the purest form of flattery. However, ~~as a result~~because of the growing use of trend forecasting, imitation brands are now able to ~~pick up on~~notice trends as fast as the "true" designers are able to develop them. As a result, individuals who wish to communicate a message of elegance and high class are now able to attain this image through purchasing inexpensive bags, shoes, and jewelry that look almost identical to designer items. Many believe that as the imitation game continues to grow, the creative innovation that fashion is known to stimulate will begin to disappear. Instead, all that will remain is repeated trends and individuals who look towards the future instead of enjoying current fashion moments.

While trend forecasting can provide economical options for fashion forward individuals, many argue that the act of forecasting has help eliminate pure inspiration that many designers seek to find. As designers look towards the future, fashion students are more interested in finding ways to keep up with the constant fluctuating weather patterns that society faces today. These students hope to ~~later~~ transform their brand messaging into creative content that will be hard for imitators to achieve in such a short timeframe

As trend forecasting continues to mature, the sociology behind branding simultaneously evolves. While the integrity of each designer and imitation brands ~~are~~is questioned ~~called into play~~, the positive image of a brand is now more important than ever. Branding allows individuals to express themselves through the eyes of the designer's vision.

Chapter 4: Communication and the Digital Age

Sociology of Branding

In the fashion industry, designers and materialistic brands are key players in the industry~~do not go unnoticed~~. While some brands such as Nike and Adidas brand their clothing with a recognizable logo, others have hidden motifs and styles that make recognizing the label almost impossible to miss. As a result, fashion as of late has turned into an imitation game – with some ~~individuals~~individuals, finding the small differences between what is ~~deemed~~ fake and real. For example, as you walk through Chinatown in Manhattan, street sellers will haggle city goers to buy bags and sunglasses – all of which are knock-offs of ~~high end~~high-end designers such as Gucci and Prada. Fashion is more than putting on clothes each morning, but it also defines where one stands on the social ladder. Iva Petkova of Columbia University shares "that for many fashion organizations class distinction has had profound importance"[20] and is often conceptualized as a process of "collective selection". Class distinction allows "outside" elites to make a strong impact on the fashion industry and particular designers.

Through our fashion choices, an individual announces to the world their social class, their "tribe", and even potentially their profession. What we wear and how we wear it serves as indicators to others around us, which is why scholars

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[20] Petkova, I. (2104). Co-Creating Strategy and Culture in New Technology Regimes on the Internet: How New Digital Entrepreneurs affect Mature Incumbents in the Fashion Industry. *Columbia University.*

argue ~~it is argued~~ that people dress for not only themselves but also the people around them. Even individuals who do not "care" are still making a statement by trying to show minimal effort. This complete thought process allows individuals to interact with brands, religious groups, and ~~of course~~ the relation they have to their socio-economic class.

Many institutions have ~~merged together~~merged to create collaborations and are working together to determine trends that are "in" and are "out". These collaborations are with merchants like Neiman Marcus, as well as, publications such as *Vogue* and *Woman's Wear Daily*.

> "These institutions significantly influence the behavior of fashion organizations, without ever actually participating in the design, production, or branding of apparel products. The direction of modernity of fashion firms has taken a course of dependence on ritualized rules of culture and practice"[21]

While brands continue to work on developing and growing through marketing and PR, it has up to the wholesalers to continue to carry out the designers vision and values. Publications and department stores are responsible for ensuring that clients understand the messaging behind each brand. While some designers such as Chanel and Yves Saint Laurent have become household names, merchants understand that it is important to support developing brands. Each brand is able to gain a stake in

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[21] Petkova, I. (2104). Co-Creating Strategy and Culture in New Technology Regimes on the Internet: How New Digital Entrepreneurs affect Mature Incumbents in the Fashion Industry. *Columbia University.*

the industry as publications have moved online and stores inventories are now accessible at the touch of a button. "Social relationships between fashion brands and their largest clients – Neiman Marcus, Saks, Nordstrom, or La Rinascente are deeply contextual and up to 80-95% of their annual revenue comes from selling apparel to these retail partners"[22]. As a result, it is crucial that each designer has a strong positive brand image so organizations like Neiman's and Vogue are able to support the label's endeavors.

As millennials begin to dominate when it comes to spending power, it is extremely important for brands to ensure that they are not overly dependent on new technology. For entrepreneurial brands it is imperative "to learn to *manage collaboratively* the parts of their value chains that are most affected by seemingly persistent shifts in entrepreneurial creativity of new peers".[23] In addition, they must be able "to branch our conceptually from the grip of their brick intermediaries, fashion brands can engage in multi-stakeholder initiatives with technology-fashion firms".[24] Essentially Petkova believes that the future of fashion and branding does not lie in one entity or initiative, but that it is crucial for brand presence throughout multiple channels. As new fashion labels develop, it is important to note their

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[22] Petkova, I. (2104). Co-Creating Strategy and Culture in New Technology Regimes on the Internet: How New Digital Entrepreneurs affect Mature Incumbents in the Fashion Industry. *Columbia University.*
[23] Petkova, I. (2104). Co-Creating Strategy and Culture in New Technology Regimes on the Internet: How New Digital Entrepreneurs affect Mature Incumbents in the Fashion Industry. *Columbia University.*
[24] Petkova, I. (2104). Co-Creating Strategy and Culture in New Technology Regimes on the Internet: How New Digital Entrepreneurs affect Mature Incumbents in the Fashion Industry. *Columbia University.*

relationship with all channels. Bloggers and social media influencers are vital aspects to help continue to develop a brand presence. While each brand defines and determines success differently, they each view and accept the future of fashion remains the common dominator.

Social Influencers and Social Media

When *Sex and the City* first premiered on HBO in 1998, the collaboration between media and fashion was only a distant thought. As the show gained traction, so did the importance of fashion as communication in collaboration with television and other media forms. The show portrayed the use of fashion choices in conjunction with the development of character's personalities, and their relationship to the culture of New York City. While the show did receive criticism for condoning gender roles, it was one of the first defining moments for the now powerful relationship between the media and the fashion industry.

Anna Wintour, Chief Editor of Vogue, single-handedly changed the landscape and relationship between publications, Television, radio, and film and designers. However, bloggers and digital influencers are once again reshaping industry norms. Digital influencers postInstagram, Snapchatsnap, and tweet to their thousands sometimes millions of followers who trust their suggestions and as a result are influenced by their fashion and beauty decisions. In August 2016, the LA Times wrote a story about the influence that bloggers have on brand management and designer influencers. They stated:

"In early June, Arielle Charnas of Something Navy posted about the Peter Thomas Roth Rose Stem Cell Bio-Repair Gel mask on her Snapchat story. Then the frenzy happened: within 24 hours after her story went live, the post was responsible for the sale of 502 masks, or $17,565 worth of product. Do the math: that's equal to $123,000 in sales in a week, $527,000 in a month or almost $6.4 million in a year".[25]

This is just one example of many. Something Navy is not the only one; influencers can received compensation can of get paid upwards of $15,000 for one post. "The new celebrities are the social influencers, and quite honestly some make more money than the people who get Emmy Awards" shares John Demsey who is an executive at Estee Lauder. He continues ,continues, "If you can deliver an audience and prove that someone can buy your product, you can get paid."[26] Social media is taking over and becoming responsible for the discovery of fashion trends and beauty techniques. We are now able to follow individuals who are relatable on Instagram and through their daily lives on Snapchat. Future clients are able to use social media contributing to globalization and making anything accessible.

Bloggers like Something Navy have an Instagram feed of different messages that apply and relate to different clients who are interested in low and high endhigh-end branding, beauty tips, and lifestyle choices. Sometimes sponsored, these These

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[25] Strugatz, R. (2016). Bloggers and Digital Influencers are Reshaping the Fashion and Beauty Landscape. *Los Angeles Times.* http://www.latimes.com/fashion/la-ig-bloggers-20160809-snap-story.html.

[26] "Strugatz, R. (2016). Bloggers and Digital Influencers are Reshaping the Fashion and Beauty Landscape. *Los Angeles Times.* http://www.latimes.com/fashion/la-ig-bloggers-20160809-snap-story.html.

posts ~~are often sponsored, but~~ are ~~also~~ brands that Charnas connects with and feels

comfortable advocating for.

Example 1 – Advertisement for Victoria Beckham for Target:

Example 2 - Lifestyle Post for Volvo:
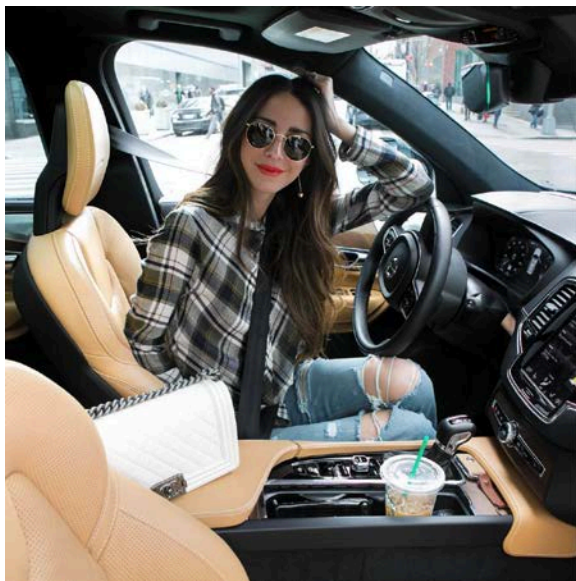
Example 3 – Ad for beauty destination Sephora:

Example 4 – Outfit of the Day:

In all four of these examples Charnas, is helping brands advertise in an expensive but effective way. With over one million followers, her global outreach is larger than many advertisements and marketing tactics could ever reach. In two of the ~~posts~~posts, she adds a hashtag with the word "ad". In 2015, the FTC changed their endorsement guidelines to require some sort of acknowledgement when it comes to paid content. In the Volvo post, Charnas adds the hashtag "volvopartner" helping to signify that she is in a partnership with them and is receiving some stipend for advertising for them. In example four, Charnas shared an outfit of the day. She is sharing an everyday look that will ~~hopefully~~ provide outfit ideas of her followers.

Today, influencers are the most relatable individuals and viewers enjoy observing what is attainable. While some view this shift in the industry as an identity crisis, others understand it as a generational shift as millennials continue to become influential across the globe. Sending items to influencers is a new and cost effective form of branding. Additionally, with the help of digital media there are now greater opportunities for niche brands to gain an audience and loyal following.

As the landscape changes, the expectations of the client have shifted as well. Instant gratification and immediate delivery of an item has started becoming the norm. This is a direct result of the attention span of the client changing. Social media shares and gives attention to trends very quickly. As a result, we consume and expect more hence why fast fashion has evolved. This has caused a shift in the industry market timeline. As fashion shows premiere, clients want the collection almost immediately after the show and brands are aware that if the client is unable to buy it they are able to get a knock-off from a different platform. This expectation

of instant gratification has developed is expected as a resultbecause of the millennial client.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Fashion is one of the most powerful ways that we communicate in society. While clothing decisions have evolved and changed, society continues to develop and signals and nonverbal cue remain important to any communication message. Clothing has always helped distinguish profession, religious preferences, and economic standing. Fashion can portray an emotion behind a thought or even a movement through imagery and context. The context in which fashion is ~~is shown and~~ displayed is what allows this communication form to be deemed powerful. Through fashion as ~~communication~~communication, we are taking art and introducing it into a nonverbal dialogue. This can be just as powerful as when we communicate verbally.

While my findings through my Capstone Project were as I expected, aspects of my research project did not always go according to plan. Due to scheduling limitations and people's locations, I was not able to interview the variety and amount of individuals I had planned ~~for~~. This limited the amount of data I had to work with and unexpectedly changed some of the direction of this manuscript. Ideally, I would have like to have my intended amount of interviewees in order to have a larger amount of data to analyze.

I had originally reached out to six individuals from a variety of different areas of the fashion industry. Three were professors at Syracuse University, two were Manhattan based fashion bloggers, and one was a fashion design student here at Syracuse. One of the professors responded promptly to inform me that he no longer

was a professor at the University.responded to me almost immediately but only to inform me that he was no longer a professor at the University. After many attempts to reach the other two professors, I never received a response from one and the other had personal problems during my research phase and could not make time to speak with me. In addition, both fashion bloggers never responded. Despite these set backssetbacks in my interviewing process, I was able to receive great data and insight into fashion as communication from the fashion design student.

Another limitation was the uncertainty and constantly changing environment that retail provides. While it is an extremely exciting time to study and focus on retail, it is also a volatile time as the future of brick and mortar is continuallycontinuously is unknown called into question. On the contrarycontrary, because retail is constantly evolving, this study can be extended. there is a future for this study.

As I look towards the future of this study, I know that there are endless opportunities to continue to develop what fashion as communication means. As a result of fashion constantly evolving, there will always be new aspects to look at.

In the future, I wish to interview more individuals in the industry to further gain a holistic view of the evolution of fashion as communication.

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