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Consuming Canada: How fashion firms leverage the landscape to create and communicate brand identities, distinction and values

Abstract

In the increasingly global and competitive fashion industry, firms are adopting a variety of strategies to generate value and brand loyalty. While some emphasise the quality of material elements such as inputs, local production and design, others focus on immaterial aspects such symbolic value and exclusivity. In recent years, place-branding has become an important way to create connections between people, places, and products. Yet, the processes behind this type of branding remain poorly understood. In particular, limited attention has been paid to the ways in which landscapes – in all their forms – are being incorporated into place-branding practices. Drawing on 87 interviews, participant observation and an innovative analysis of Instagram accounts, this paper examines how a range of Canadian fashion firms leverage the landscape to create and communicate brand identities, distinction and values. It demonstrates how firms of different sizes and scales construct, harness, or reimagine landscapes and/or popular stereotypes to connect with Canadian identities and consumers. It also highlights how landscape-centric branding can be combined with broader value creation strategies such as local production. In so doing, this paper brings together the economic geography literature on place branding and the cultural geography literature on landscape and identity, and makes a methodological contribution to nascent examinations of social media and visual data sources in geography.

Keywords: fashion; place-branding; values; landscape; social media; Canada

1. Introduction

Fashion is a globalised, image-intensive and highly-competitive industry that is undergoing a period of significant restructuring (Crewe, 2017). There is growing uncertainty in the marketplace as digitalisation and e-commerce bring new challenges and opportunities (Amed et al., 2017). With declining entry barriers and changing consumer habits, firms of all sizes – from global luxury brands to local independent producers – are under mounting pressure to attract the attention of consumers and convince them to buy their products. As a result, firms are adopting a variety of strategies to create and communicate values. Some independent firms endeavour to enhance the material value of garments through high quality inputs, local production and timeless design (Crewe, 2013a; Pike 2015; XX et al., 2015; XX, 2017 – obscured self-references will be added after the review process). Another strategy involves the immaterial aspects of a

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product and constructing symbolic value through branding, imaginaries and identity (Pike, 2013; 2015). Indeed, place branding, which is about how "place gets into goods by the way its elements manage to combine" (Molotch 2002, 686), is an increasingly important way to create connections between people, place, and product.

However, the processes behind this type of branding remain poorly understood (Pike, 2009; 2015). Indeed, Pike (2015) argues that economic geography has consistently undervalued brands as an area of study and that many theories and accounts stop abruptly as the product leaves the factors gates. In particular, limited attention has been paid to the ways in which landscapes – in all their forms – are being incorporated into place-branding practices within creative industries such as fashion. Moreover, given the dominant focus of existing studies within economic geography on global fashion capitals such as Paris (Larner et al., 2007; Rantisi, 2011) and global fashion brands such as Burberry (Moore and Birtwistle, 2004; Power and Hauge, 2008; Pike, 2009; 2015; Tokatli 2012) less is known about the ways in which second tier markets or emerging brands function.

To address these gaps and nuance our collective understanding, this paper brings together the economic geography literature on place branding and the cultural geography literature on landscape and identity in order to examine how a range of Canadian fashion firms, including established national champions and independent upstarts, leverage the landscape to create and communicate brand identities, distinction and values. Canada is an ideal case because it features a diverse range of landscapes and an understudied fashion industry that includes a variety of established and emerging fashion brands and fashion centres (XX, 2017; XX ZZ, 2017). Moreover, as a young country – which celebrated its 150th birthday in 2017 – with a young

fashion industry, Canada can yield insights into the ongoing process of carving out a national identity[1].

With a wide range of methods and expertise, geographers are well positioned to study the intersection of the physical landscape, branding and digital technologies (Pike 2015). For this study, a mixed-methods approach to the study of the Canadian fashion industry was developed, comprised of 87 interviews with independent fashion designers and key informants, participant observation at fashion industry events, and analysis of the social media accounts of fashion firms. Following the methodology of Rose (2012), a novel data set of over 2000 images from the Instagram accounts of five Canadian fashion firms has been constructed. A visual analysis of the ways in which firms utilise the landscape in their branding was conducted and five vignettes about each how firm portray fashion, identity and the Canadian landscape is presented.

The findings suggest that the Canadian landscape is central to the branding strategies of a variety of fashion firms in Canada, from luxury outdoor apparel to small lifestyle brands. These firms explicitly utilise the landscape in their branding in order to connect to, and (re)create, conceptualisations of Canadian identity. Moreover, firms choose to either embrace and/or reinvent notions of stereotypes around Canadian identity and lifestyle. Landscape-centric branding is also positioned as a layer within broader value creating strategies.

After reviewing the literature on place branding and the landscape, the paper provides an overview of the Canadian fashion industry and the research design. This is followed by five vignettes which examine how each selected firm leverages the landscape in their branding and a discussion section which unpacks three emergent themes related to Canadian stereotypes, consumer identity and place and the layering of value.

[1] Of course, this 'official' birthday does not reflect the much longer presence, history, and legacy of the diverse Aboriginal populations in Canada.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Place branding and economic geography

In the contemporary economy, aesthetics, identities, signs and symbols can be utilised to differentiate, communicate and add value(s) to people, products and places (XX et al., 2013; Lash and Urry, 1994). As part of these processes, brands and branding have been studied by geographers from a variety of perspectives, such as brand architecture (Dooley and Bowie, 2005), cultural quarters and creative cities (Evans, 2003; Vanolo, 2008; 2015), rural development (Lee et al., 2015) and even personal brands (Sjöholm and Pasquinelli, 2014). More recently, economic geographers have focussed on the relationships between branding and geography (Power and Hauge, 2008; Pike, 2009; 2011a; 2011b; 2013; 2015). While not all brands engage with spatial elements, this literature suggests that place branding can offer powerful associations laced with meaning, memories and values (Pike, 2011b). Moreover, specific spatial entanglements, such as where products are invented, designed, made or sold, can play a key role in the 'production of difference' and the processes through which branded objects are evaluated and understood (Power 2010; Pike 2011b, 2015). Place branding can thus imbue and project economic, social, cultural and political meanings and connotations (Pike, 2013, 2015). Menswear tailoring from Saville Row in London (Crewe, 2013a), and products, such as Nordic winter and outdoor sporting goods (Hauge and Power, 2013) are examples of the connection between quality, product and place.

Despite the growing range of valuable studies on this topic, several key aspects of place-branding remain poorly understood (Power and Hauge, 2008; Pike, 2011b, 2015). There is a need to move beyond established global brands such as Newcastle Brown Ale (Pike, 2011a) and to engage with the place-branding strategies and practices of independent and mid-size firms

with different resource levels (XX et al., 2013). Moreover, whereas examinations typically focus on physical representations of brands such as posters or labels and the physical spaces that communicate brand value such as flagship stores (Jansson and Power, 2010; Crewe 2016), less is known about the ways in which places and qualities are articulated in virtual spaces including online retail and social media platforms. Indeed, Crewe (2013b) calls for geographers to investigate the 'economics of digital transition.'

More recently, Pike (2015) has put forward a more sophisticated and nuanced consideration of place-branding. His conceptualization of 'origination' aims to theorize how, why, by whom, where and in what ways geographical associations are deployed through branding to create and fix meaning and value. Crucially, Pike (2015) calls for critical examinations of the multiple and overlapping geographical associations – which may be material, symbolic, discursive, visual or aural – to identify and understand the ways in which brands and brand actors strategically emphasize or obscure specific elements. As his 'socio-spatial biographies' of firms such as Burberry and Apple demonstrate, while some actors play up certain desirable and valued meanings such as heritage, quality and reputation connoted by particulates places, others may mask less commercially valuable or damaging elements such as unethical production performed in specific parts of the world. Researchers are encouraged to go beyond the constraints of typical 'national' or 'country of origin' approaches to engage with geographical associations which are more fluid and may play out at different spatial scales – especially within the context of international divisions of labour and globally integrated markets (Pike 2015). We find Pike's relational approach to geographical associations very constructive and the paper incorporates themes from the origination concept such as spatial discontinuity and selectivity into the analysis.

2.2 Geographies of landscape and identity

While some firms rely on place in the construction and reconstruction of brand identities, studies in economic geography often overlook what is really being offered for consumption: the landscape. Therefore, this paper also engages with cultural geography literature related to the representations and meanings of landscapes. According to Widgren (2004, 459) landscapes can be viewed in three ways: as scenery, as institution and as resource. Landscapes can take on many meanings, from strong visual connotations to feelings of community or memories from a photo of a particular place (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Cosgrove, 2006; Olwig, 1996).

The landscape can be actively constructed to support and/or legitimize national identities (Leitner and Kang, 1999). Indeed, landscapes are not only physical and highly symbolic territories with boundaries, but are also mental images in our imaginary (Sörlin, 1999). As such, Sörlin argues that landscapes also exist as symbolic or mental categories, imbued with social and cultural heritage. In some countries, such as Sweden, official landscape heritage has been utilized as a tool to support powerful discourses of national identity (Germundsson, 2005). Importantly, landscapes are not static, but rather evolving, mediated, and contested (Leitner and Kang, 1999; Sörlin, 1999). As such, Warf and Ferras (2015) remind us of the need to challenge dominant discourses of the nation and scales of analysis, such as the sub-state or region, in the construction of identity.

In this context, traditionally it has been the rural landscape, and the ways in which it has been shaped by economic, social, cultural and political institutions, that has been the subject of study. Indeed, the landscape is not the result of 'natural' processes but is produced and constructed (Setten, 2004). As Schein (2003, 203) describes:

The landscape is not innocent. Its role in mediating social and cultural reproduction

> works through its ability to stand for something: norms, values, fears, and so on. Through our ability to read landscapes, those very norms, values, and fears are perpetuated, reproduced, or challenged.

Crucially, these meanings are processual and evolving (Pratt, 1998) and as such, can be difficult to pin-down or quantify.

The field of landscape studies provides clues about how to study contemporary landscapes and gaps in our understanding. For example, Cosgrove (2006) argues that while in the premodern world, the landscape was dominated by production, today's landscape is often defined by consumption. As such, this paper presents a study of the landscape and identity as it is mobilised for consumption and branding purposes. With respect to the types of landscapes that have been studied, given the new data sources such as social media that are available to geographers, there is considerable opportunity to study representations of the landscape related to branding through virtual spaces. Furthermore, in landscape geography studies, there has been less of a focus on the economic. This is not necessarily a critique, but rather an aspect that has been overlooked to date. Indeed, within geography there is a rich understanding of landscapes and the economic value of place but these two fields have not been engaging with each other. For example, while Pike (2011b) discusses brands as "consuming place," overlooking uses of the landscape is problematic, as the landscape is a fundamental part of heritage and national identities that are being discussed. As such, we seek to explore the ways in which landscape, heritage and national identity can be connected to economic and cultural processes of value-creation.

2.3 Place branding and fashion

The fashion industry serves as an ideal case to bring together the study of place-branding,

identity and the landscape. Whereas branding and place-branding is increasingly important across the consumer marketplace, the fashion industry is at the forefront of these trends. The fashion industry is home to well-established global brands, reputations and imaginaries, such as perceptions of fast fashion[2] from China compared to Prêt à Porter[3] from Italy (Reinach, 2005). A recent report from Forbes (2017) revealed that the fashion industry is also home to some of the world's most valuable brands, including Nike (ranked 16th), Louis Vuitton (ranked 20th), H&M (ranked 36th), Hermes (ranked 44th) and Gucci (ranked 47th). However, these reputations are fluid and evolving. As Reinach (2005, 47) argues:

> A new fashion culture is now emerging…it is the culture of instant or fast fashion, born of the globalisation of trends, of a global concept of production and domestic marketing. Quick and easy brands capable of answering the needs of a new consumer who is fickle and changeable, and quite different from those desires prompted by life-styles and the democratisation of luxury.

Indeed, fashion has long been regarded as the quintessential signifier of class and way for elites to distinguish themselves from the masses (Simmel 1904). As Crane and Bovone (2006, 321) describe, "clothing as a form of material culture is especially suitable for studying the relationship between personal values and values attributed to material goods because of its close association with perceptions of the self." Yet, the desire for social distinction, prestige and personality via consumption and style is intensifying (Bourdieu, 1984; XX et al., 2013). For Zukin (2004) shopping is the primary strategy for creating value and way for individuals to define 'who they are' and 'who they want to become'. Paradoxically, constructing an identity through consumption involves striking a balance between group conformity and individuality (Paterson, 2006; XX, 2010).

[2] 'Fast fashion' is a catchall term for international firms that utilise flexible and global supply chains to produce trendy, inexpensive clothing.
[3] Prêt à Porter can be translated into 'ready to wear.' The difference between Prêt à Porter and Haute Couture is that Haute Couture is made by hand, and Prêt à Porter is industrially produced.

Beyond the individual level, fashion is also a central part of a nation's cultural landscape, and the imagery and representations that consumers use in constructing their identity (Rantisi, 2011). According to Reinach (2009, 2), "a nation's capacity to create fashion (to be recognised as an 'author country'), however, is part of a process of renegotiating hierarchies and roles according to the contexts and players concerned." However, constructing this identity can be a particular challenge for "tier-two" (Rantisi, 2011) or "not-so-global" centres in the fashion industry like New Zealand (Larner et al., 2007) that lack the cultural resources and reputation that leading fashion capitals like Paris maintain. In tier-two markets, boutiques and fashion weeks have been identified as key intermediaries in the construction of fashion identities (Rantisi, 2011).

To date, most of the existing literature on place-branding and fashion focusses on well-known, global firms such as Burberry (Moore and Birtwistle, 2004; Power and Hauge, 2008; Pike, 2009; 2015), Gucci (Tokatli, 2013) and Prada (Tokatli 2014), or places such as Paris (Scott and Ellis, 2000) or Milan (d'Ovidio, 2015; Jansson and Power, 2010; Merlo and Poelese, 2006; Reinach, 2006). Therefore, there is a need to look at a variety of firms, in different places and at different scales, to examine the ways in which place branding is utilised as a value-creation strategy (Pike 2015). In particular, less is known about independent firms operating in less-established fashion centres such as Canada. Furthermore, very little is known about the ways in which 'brand narratives' are constructed and communicated in digital channels including social media platforms (Crewe, 2013b). A recent report highlights the growing importance of online markets for fashion brands, who have the choice to go 'digital or die' (Abtan et al. 2016). As the report states, "digital is happening fast and forcefully, whether brands are ready for it or not…" (Abtan et al., 2016). Indeed, despite the fact that, "the Internet has brought new fashion worlds

into the homes, screens, and minds of consumers" (Crewe, 2013b, p. 775), the implications for the growth of digital platforms and marketing for fashion firms remains poorly understood. This paper addresses these gaps and highlights digital transitions by looking at how Canadian fashion firms, at different sizes and scales, construct and communicate place-based fashion identities, through virtual channels to generate distinction, value and loyalty.

3. Background to the Canadian fashion industry

Canada has considerable potential as a case for the study of landscape geography. With a total area of 9,984,670 sq. km, the country is highly urbanised while also home to a diverse range of landscapes, with radical variations in climate, terrain and elevation. The Arctic landscape and the rugged terrain of the North are distinguishing features of the country. However, despite the richness and diversity of the Canadian landscape, it remains under-studied. Indeed, while the landscape concept has been examined in relation to creating and promoting national identities and political ideologies such as French Speaking nationalism in Quebec (Desbiens, 2000) or towards formalised heritage preservation in the shaping of regional and national discourses (Germundsson, 2005), this research seeks to examine the ways in which the landscape is used in the place-branding activities of fashion firms.

The Canadian fashion industry employs approximately 13,000 people, from fashion designers, to manufacturers, retailers and those in administrative roles, and contributes $790 million to the country's GDP (Nordicity, 2015). While there are a few large design businesses in Canada, the vast majority of fashion design businesses in Canada are small businesses with less than four employees (Statistics Canada, 2013). Independent designers are typically domestically-oriented, while Canada is also home to a few large fashion firms with an international presence (XX, 2017; XX YY, 2017; XX ZZ, 2017). While lifestyle or outdoor-related fashion brands are a

key component of the Canadian fashion industry, other sectors of the industry include womenswear and menswear brands, as well as accessories and leather goods companies.

4. Methods

The empirical material presented in this paper comes from a qualitative case study of Canada's fashion system involving interviews (Valentine, 2005), participant observation (Cook, 2005) and analysis of virtual spaces (Rose, 2012). The approach and use of mixed methods builds on Pike's (2015) socio-spatial biographies of specific brands and his calls for comparative case studies to illuminate the value and wider claims of 'origination' as a conceptual theoretical framework. A total of 87 semi-structured interviews were conducted; 54 with independent fashion designers from Canada across and 33 with key informants from the wider industry including government officials, fashion-studies academics, public relations firms and consultants, fashion buyers, stylists and journalists. A number of these individuals also had previous experience working for large and/or international fashion firms based in Canada. Interview topics included their entrepreneurial motivations and experiences, their branding and marketing strategies, and their perceptions of Canada and Canadian fashion. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following James (2006), we annotated transcripts and coded the data according to the dominant themes. As is common with qualitative interviews, our goal was not to establish statistical significance or representativeness but rather analytical plausibility and cogency of reasoning (James 2006). Quotations are utilised in-text to best demonstrate how participants expressed themselves and their experiences.

To triangulate the interview data and better understand the complexities of the visual imagery and brand-related marketing strategies of fashion firms, observation was also conducted

during twenty fashion shows and related events. Access to closed settings such as front-rows and backstage was granted through a gatekeeper (Campbell et al., 2006). Following the methodology of Cook (2005), after an observation event, data was collected recording observations in the form of written field notes. Developing an understanding the nuances and ethos of the fashion industry in Canada was important to gaining insight into the different branding strategies fashion designers utilised.

Although the interviews and observation generated rich and relevant data, Mitchell (2008) and Henderson (2003) argue that to study landscapes effectively we need to 'learn by looking', to go beyond conventional forms of fieldwork and to consider a variety of different data sources. As landscape images are an important part of the media flow, Widgren (2004) suggests that studying advertisements, which make use of landscapes to convey ideas and feelings, can be particularly useful. During interviews respondents revealed the growing importance and centrality of social media and Instagram in particular. As one independent designer explained: "we rely on Instagram because it is the most visual platform. Social media almost evens the playing field (between us and larger firms) by allowing the small players a voice." Therefore, our study also included a compositional analysis (outlined below) of visual online data from Instagram.

Founded in 2010, Instagram is a popular online social media site that allows people and companies to share photos and videos through its smart phone app, accompanied by short descriptions and/or hashtags. Instagram, which has over 700 million monthly users (Business Insider, 2017) is part of a new representational sphere and set of spaces that are being created through social media. Indeed, unlike traditional and static ad campaigns, Instagram and other online digital media platforms allow a variety of actors to engage with and create content in real

time. Like smart phones, social media platforms also represent a new set of 'touch points' which branding actors seek to closely control and leverage (Pike 2015). As Crewe (2013b, p. 774) describes, the Internet has significantly:

> "opened up new spaces of consumption that are unprecedented in their levels of ubiquity, immersion, fluidity, and interactivity…The Internet has the capacity to absorb the subject with unprecedented multidimensionality, involving visuality, sociality, interactivity at-a-distance: immersive environments that communicate with all of our senses at the same time, all of the time: emotional performances."

Crucially, fashion firms operating at different scales, with different motivations and resources, utilise the same technologies and platforms to connect with their target consumers. Thus, it is evident that the study of virtual spaces through the use of social media data is not only justified by the growing significance of digital media for the fashion industry, but also for the rich sensory experiences it provides insight into.

The first step was to conduct a preliminary analysis of the prevalence of the landscape on the Instagram accounts of 15 fashion firms in Canada (see table 1). This purposeful sample attempted to reflect the wide range of fashion firms in Canada, including established independent brands (such as Marie St. Pierre, Comrags, Judith and Charles), emerging independent brands (such as Jennifer Torosian, Horses Atelier, Sid Neigum), outdoor apparel brands (Canada Goose, Roots), lifestyle brands (Tuck Shop Trading Co., Province of Canada) sportswear (Lululemon), as well as Canada's oldest retailer, The Hudson's Bay Company. The preliminary analysis involved a review of the 100 most recent Instagram posts of each firm. A visual content analysis (Bell, 2000) was conducted to simply count the number of images that include the landscape in the broadest sense - from images of paintings of the landscape to photos including urban or rural settings (see table 1).

*Table 1: Firm use of the landscape in branding (*about here)

This review revealed that some firms in the sample prefer to build their brand story on personal and less geographic aspects of the firm, such as the narrative of the founder or the company and feature images of their clothing in settings such as bowling alleys, brick walls or in a field of flowers. Other firms use landscape imagery but choose to emphasise the global nature (and/or aspirations) of the brand, by showing images of their clothing being worn in global cities such as Paris. A third category of firms aim to tell their brand story through explicit connections to Canadian landscapes. While our analysis revealed that a number of other firms are utilizing the landscape in their branding, in order to keep the analysis manageable and facilitate comparison across cases (Pike 2015), we chose to focus on five firms with the highest number of landscape images (Tuck Shop Trading Co., Canada Goose, Roots, Province of Canada, and HBC Heritage).

While primarily lifestyle fashion brands, often with a focus on 'athleisure' and/or outdoor clothing, these firms represent different ages, sizes, locations, international orientations and market segments. For example, while Hudson Bay Company, Canada Goose, and Roots are established, international brands, Province of Canada and Tuck Shop Trading Co are less than five years old and are more domestically oriented brands. While the Hudson's Bay Company, Canada Goose and Roots are large, international companies and coincidentally, all have American ownership and/or investment despite being based in Canada[4], Province of Canada and Tuck Shop Trading Co. are small, independent firms. All of the firms have their headquarters in Canada. Table 2 provides a snapshot of the social media presence of each brand (as of June 2016) and a brief introduction to the companies.

[4] The Hudson's Bay Company was purchased in 2008 by an American private investment firm NRDC partners (Shaw, 2015a), Canada Goose sold a majority stake to American private equity firm Bain Capital in 2013 (Ligaya, 2013), and Roots sold a majority stake to investment firm Searchlight Capital – who have offices in Toronto, London and New York City – in 2015 (Shaw, 2015b). Interestingly, in each sale, the positive connotations of the "Canadian-ness" of each brand was cited as a key factor in choosing to invest in the company.

*Table 2: Sample of Canadian Fashion Firms (*about here)

To analyse the ways in which the landscape is utilised by these fashion firms on Instagram, Rose's (2012) critical approach to the study of visual materials was adopted. This approach requires a number of commitments from the researcher: to take images seriously, to think about the social conditions and effects of visual objects, and to consider your own way of looking at images (Rose, 2012, 15-16). The method of analysis was compositional interpretation, which focuses on the 'content and form' of images (Rose, 2012). According to Rose (2012, 170), there are three sites where the meanings of images are made: the site of production, the site of the image itself, and the site where the image is seen by various audiences. There are also three modalities (defined as "aspects of images that can contribute to a critical understanding of images") to consider:

- *Technical*: visual technologies that enhance vision;
- *Compositional*: strategies that go into how image is made;
- *Social*: range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image.

This analysis focused predominately on the site of the image itself, examining the compositional modality and the social modality of the images. The questions in Table 3 adapted from Rose (2012), guided this analysis. For each of the five firms profiled, each image on Instagram was analysed using the questions in Table 3. In conducting the analysis, detailed notes were taken on individual images, as well as on the collection of images taken together (see for example, questions 3 and 6). Figure 1 provides a sample of typical images on Instagram, courtesy of Province of Canada.

*Table 3: Questions Guiding Visual Analysis (*about here)

*Figure 1: Sample of Instagram account images (courtesy of Province of Canada) (*about here)

Landscape geographers emphasise the importance of social and cultural context in reading the landscape (cf. Pratt, 1998; Sörlin, 1999; Cosgrove, 2006). If landscapes are a way of seeing, the reflexivity and positionality of the person viewing the landscape becomes crucial. Reading the images of the landscape is thus highly personal and draws upon situated knowledge based on experience and identity. Therefore, while the process of compositional interpretation was structured the questions presented in Table 3 and detailed notes were taken, it was also important to gain a 'feel' for the images and rely on previous experience and knowledge of the fashion industry. In terms of positionality, both authors are Canadians who have experienced the Canadian landscape first-hand and have engaged in previous research projects related to fashion and consumption in Canada. This familiarity helped us conduct the visual analysis and proved useful in interpreting the rich results of the interviews and observation (Valentine 2005).

5. Empirical Findings

5.1 The Hudson's Bay Company: The landscape as nation building

In analysing the Instagram account of the Hudson's Bay Company (also known as HBC or 'The Bay'), two dominant landscapes were identified: the rustic landscape of Northern Canada, and an urban landscape connected to HBC department stores in cities. The HBC has a long history in Canada, beginning as a fur trading brand in 1670 and many of the images on Instagram highlight HBC's history as explorers and traders. Maps that document the expansion of the brand territory while also shedding light on the changing boundaries and geographies of Canada as a country, are also common on the HBC Instagram account.

While these consistent heritage-themed images invoke a 'reflective' form of nostalgia (Cosgrove 2006), the urban landscape was also depicted in photos, in the form of images

celebrating the opening of new HBC department stores in cities across the country such as St. John's, Newfoundland and Victoria, British Columbia. As these stores would often be one of the largest retail establishments in a city or town, these images reinforce the Company's 'anchor' position on high-streets across the country. This example also highlights the relationship between physical 'brand channels' such as flagship stores and promotional storytelling in virtual spaces (Jansson and Power, 2010). Thus, beyond capitalising on a historical legacy no other fashion firm in Canada can match, HBC is demonstrating their place in a sophisticated and modernising landscape, far removed from distant trading posts in which the firm remains relevant and central. Interestingly, although the actual clothing was often a secondary focus, when featured, garments are often described as high quality, durable and appropriate for traveling across the country.

5.2 *Canada Goose: The landscape and luxury*

As a winter apparel company, it is not surprising that winter and arctic landscapes dominate the visual identity of Canada Goose on Instagram. Many of these images feature a model wearing a Canada Goose product with snow or icebergs serving as the backdrop. More recently, as the company has begun to expand their product lines beyond cold weather gear, more diverse landscapes such as green forests, rainy spring days and even urban environments also appear on their Instagram. The urban environment is also portrayed as an unpredictable and unyielding landscape, such as an image of the CN Tower on a stormy day in Toronto, almost entirely obscured by fog. Both indoor and outdoor urban environments are reimagined with respect to nature. For example, a picture of a shiny skyscraper in downtown Toronto is captioned 'an iceberg', while an image of different coloured floors inside of the Guggenheim museum is described as 'sediment'. Thus, even the urban can be nature in the Canada Goose world.

A common theme across all of the depicted landscapes – whether urban or arctic, sun or snow – is adventures in nature. The landscape is positioned as something to be conquered and explored while wearing Canada Goose. In line with Hauge and Power (2013), the firm has established, exploited and exported a connection between the extreme conditions found in the Canadian landscape. It also seeks to create a premium based on quality by emphasising that its clothes are designed and manufactured in Canada (Pike 2015). Canada Goose is respected by other players in the Canadian fashion industry for their commitment to Canadian manufacturing. As one key informant explained: "Canada Goose is a huge inspiration to us and a great example of a successful Canadian brand that still manufactures everything in Canada, which is hard to do at their scale" (personal interview). Highlighting the trend of creating relationships with consumers and enrolling them in co-promotion (XX et al., 2013), the brand also encourages consumers to share images of their adventures and trips in Canada with the hashtag #Askanyonewhoknows.

5.3 Roots: Cozy Canadiana

The hashtag #RootsisCanada sums up the Roots Instagram profile. More explicitly than any other company, Roots presents their brand as an integral feature of the Canadian landscape. Looking at this account without prior knowledge of the Canadian landscape, one might think that Canada is one big lake, surrounded by a forest, with mountains in the distance. The urban environment is rarely featured on this Instagram.

Whereas Canada Goose focuses on adventures in extreme conditions, Roots is more relaxed in its approach to travel and exploring. It is about being comfortable – sweatpants or sweatshirts are popular products of the brand – while camping or hiking and 'representing'

Canada by wearing their branded clothing. As the brand describes in one post, "no matter where your journeys might lead, always bring a piece of home with you."

In a perfect illustration of Pike's (2015) notion of 'spatial discontinuity,' even though the company was founded by two American entrepreneurs, Roots positions Canada as the home of the business and strongly emphasises the Canadian-ness of the landscape and the brand on Instagram. Indeed, a sense of belonging and attachment is stressed, with the landscape described as "our country" and "everywhere we want to be". This demonstrates how geographical attachments, whether real or imagined, are shaped by brands and branding agents (Pike 2011b; 2015). By extension, the finding supports Pike's (2015) claim that once established, geographical associations and reputations tend to be sticky and difficult to change or dislodge. The ability of Roots to weather well-publicised revelations of offshoring and sweatshop conditions in Chinese factories also highlights the power of persistent place-branding and the role of selectivity in constructing specific geographical associations. Indeed, by celebrating and 'playing up' the limited instances when items, including leather goods, are made in Canada, Roots is able to mask and obscure its international supply chains and production practices in countries such as China. (Pike, 2011b; 2015; Tokatli, 2008; Tokatli, 2014).

While all of the brands under examination use their Instagram account to market their clothing to consumers, Roots is perhaps the brand that connects their clothing to nature the most. For example, a recent line of leather bags was even called "The Great Outdoors Collection". More broadly, clothing is described as "comfortable, breathable and natural", seemingly designed to blend into, and become a part of, the landscape.

5.4 Province of Canada: Creating contemporary Canadian citizens

Province of Canada portrays lakes and beaches as the dominant Canadian landscape. Forests and snow are a more common sight during the winter months – coupled with branded toques and sweatshirts – but for most of the year, sandy beaches and green trees serve as the backdrop for the brand. Province of Canada emphasises that their clothing is made in Canada, and as such, their clothing is a 'natural' part of the landscape. Local manufacturing is also connected to notions of quality, authenticity and sustainability (Crewe, 2013a; Pike, 2011a; 2015; XX, 2017).

The aesthetic of the Instagram account is clean and simple. Rather than depicting the red and white colours of the Canadian flag a red maple leaf is not to be found on this Instagram. Instead, the brand image is very tonal – black, white, grey, cream; which also happens to be the colours of the clothing that the brand sells. Even an image of two models wearing Province of Canada while carrying a Canadian flag has been 'photo-shopped' so that the flag is black and white.

As Pike (2015) suggests, actors launching new branded goods can take advantage of the pliability of virtual spaces to write their own spatial scripts and create their own geographic imaginaries. While other brands may embrace Canadian stereotypes, to compete with established firms, Province of Canada actively tries to reinvent them. Lumberjacks and other Canadian clichés are given their due in a tongue-in-cheek manner, such having a 'Canadian Nickname Generator' on their website. But the 'new' Canada according to Province of Canada is young, cool, modern and stylish. As the 'about us' page describes:

> We're typical Canadians. Maple syrup, camping, moccasins, lumberjack plaid – we don't dislike these stereotypes. On the contrary, we grew up on them, we just know that there is more to Canada and Canadian style. To us, Canada is about luxury and quality as much as it is casual and cozy. It's about the beach and lake life as much as it is the city. It's about classic as much as it is cool. We've set out to create a brand that represents the lifestyle and culture that is being cultivated throughout Canada. The time is right for a Canadian inspired lifestyle brand that is 100% Made in Canada. One that honours the past but is always looking forward to a fashionable future.

Province of Canada also portrays a national, rather than regional or city, focus. For example, a post celebrating the Toronto Raptors making it to the NBA Eastern Conference finals called the Raptors "Team Canada."

5. 5 Tuck Shop Trading Co.: Canadian Cottage Life

The Instagram of Tuck Shop Trading Co. relies heavily on two opposing landscapes: the cottage and urban neighbourhoods. Like other firms in the sample, the Canadian landscape is portrayed in two distinct seasons: cottages and lakes in the summer, and ice and snow in the winter. However, it is summers at the cottage that serve as the main inspiration behind the brand. The brand recently released a collection of clothing and accessories bearing the print of a vintage map of Canada. The tagline for the collection was 'get lost', with the campaign encouraging the exploration of Canada. The cottage is also depicted as a peaceful and rustic escape from the hectic pace of city life.

As the brand is based in Toronto, the city's urban landscapes such as images of the CN Tower and the city skyline along Lake Ontario, also feature prominently on Instagram. Toronto also provided inspiration for a successful collection called 'City of Neighbourhoods,' which featured clothing with the names of well-known neighbourhoods on them. This collection has expanded to include many major North American cities. Therefore, even when living in a large North American city, the brand encourages their customers to be a part of, and represent, their local community. Here, the landscape goes from being national to highly localised. Hashtags such as #loveyourcity and #loveyourhood are used to connect pride and place. This reinforces the findings of Duncan and Duncan (2001), who argue that landscapes are central to place-based social identities, with the neighbourhood acting as a key source of distinction and pride in this

context. The example also supports the work of XX et al. (2013) who argue that fashion firms not only draw inspiration from localised scenes and neighbourhoods but can generate value by linking specific products to those places and providing a spatial signifier of cutting edge consumption.

6. Discussion

Table 4 provides a summary of the key findings from the empirical analysis. While it has been demonstrated that specific values are expressed through the Canadian landscape and in turn, embedded in the clothing being sold, this discussion section unpacks some emergent themes and tensions in more detail.

Table 4: How fashion firms leverage the landscape (about here)

6.1 Canadian Stereotypes

Place branding enables firms to connect products to particular lifestyles and identities (Molotch, 2002; Pike, 2011). Our analysis revealed that making these connections entails acknowledging and engaging with stereotypical representations of Canada, from hockey and cold to lumberjacks in plaid and maple syrup. Indeed, some of the firms in our sample have chosen to embrace Canadian stereotypes in their branding. This strategy makes sense as it allows a firm to tap into an already established and well-known 'brand' of Canadian identity. For example, the Instagram account of the Hudson's Bay Company, emphasises 'iconic' products (such as a blanket with the well-known green, red, yellow and navy-blue stripes of the Company) in front of identifiable Canadian landmarks. Roots also readily embraces Canadian stereotypes in their branding, such as a recent ad campaign that tied into the reputation of Canadian's as being 'nice'.

In embracing these stereotypes, we also found that brands are playing with perceptions of

Canada. For example, despite the fact that Canada is a highly-urbanised country with over 80% of the population living in cities, the dominant landscape featured in the images of the five Instagram profiles is that of the Canadian wilderness; a natural, rugged landscape of lakes, snowy mountains and trees. Firms often connect this landscape to the popular Canadian summer pastime of being at the cottage.

Another stereotype is winter, which is a core component of the national psyche – and pop culture. For example, “We The North” is the successful slogan for the Toronto Raptors basketball team, while the tagline “We Are Winter” was Team Canada’s motto for the 2014 Winter Olympics. The latter was recently reimagined as the slogan “Ice in Our Veins” for Team Canada at the 2016 Summer Olympics. Thus, even when it is hot outside, Canada is still perceived as cold and winter was interpreted by firms to mean many different things. For Canada Goose, cold represents extremes and luxury, yet for Roots, the cold becomes about comfort and cosiness.

As Duncan and Duncan (2001, 387) argue, the landscape is a form of social capital whereby, “members of certain communities can mobilise enough economic and cultural capital to create landscapes that have the power to incorporate and assimilate some ideas while excluding or erasing others”. In creating, and/or assimilating ideas, we also found examples of firms deliberately trying to challenge or reinvent Canadian stereotypes. Newer firms, like Province of Canada and Tuck Shop Trading Co. are playing with these stereotypes by interpreting them in updated, modern and fashionable ways. For example, Province of Canada in their branding emphasise Canada and the maple leaf, but in black and white, rather than red. Through creating a new Canadian identity through their visual branding, the company is also offering a way of belonging to this community. The brand also includes handwritten notes with

online purchases that welcome customers (who are called citizens) to the Province. This may also suggest that the brand – and their new community of citizens – is welcoming and inclusive. Images of a Canadian passport and plane tickets are also featured on Instagram; suggesting that Province of Canada citizens can represent Canada – and the brand – wherever they might go.

6.2 Consumer identity and place

As Rantisi (2011) notes, tier-two fashion markets, which lack the networks of cultural resources, established design reputation, commercial resources and government promotion found in global fashion capitals, can struggle to create and market a distinct and viable local identity. During interviews, designers described the challenges of connecting with Canadian consumers, dealing with the American 'cultural behemoth' to the south and competing in the highly competitive global fashion marketplace. As one key informant explained:

> "Canada has a history of being an annex of US brands and an importer of brands from the United States. It started in the industry in the 1970s and has continued. It has always been easier for someone to get into the apparel business by licensing and importing brands, rather than creating your own" (personal interview).

It is therefore imperative for Canadian fashion firms (and particularly independent firms) to create brand awareness, simply because the average consumer is less likely to know about them. As one designer described: "The reality is that people are familiar with, and then buy, international and American brands before buying Canadian designers" (personal interview). Our analysis revealed a number of strategies that designers use to connect their clothing to place-based consumer identities in order to generate value, distinction and loyalty. For example, the HBC uses their Instagram account to remind consumers about their role throughout the history of Canada; a fact that may become an increasingly important differentiation strategy as American department stores are aggressively expanding into Canada. By contrast, Canada Goose

emphasises that their Canadian roots and domestic manufacturing makes them the true experts on winter and cold.

An important subtheme relates to how landscapes can be used to articulate a sense of community at a variety of scales (Cosgrove 2006). While our study initially focused on the national scale (such as a Canadian flag on a t-shirt or connecting to national stereotypes) we also found subtler forms of branding at the city and neighbourhood (or local) scale (Pike 2015). This can be as specific as the micro-geographies of a particular street, such as Saville Row in London (Crewe, 2013a). For example, Tuck Shop Trading Co. and their 'City of Neighbourhoods' collection emphasises the connection to a local neighbourhood and scene, which may be perceived as more exclusive and requiring 'insider knowledge' and cultural capital to recognise and appreciate (XX et al., 2013).

As Crane and Bovone (2006, 321) assert "clothes both affect and express our perceptions of ourselves." Interestingly, in addition to connecting to Canadian consumers inside Canada, fashion firms are using the landscape to connect to Canadians living or traveling abroad. As one designer described, "our customer base has mainly been in Canada but we've had orders from the US, UK, France and Germany. You can tell when you get an expat order and that is super cool for us to see" (personal interview). By producing clothes with overt (Canadian flags) or subtler (neighbourhood maps or street names) Canadian content, brands are connecting to memories of home and nostalgia for consumers abroad, while also providing a visible way for individuals to project their identity outwards (Crosgrove 2006).

Once consumers adopt a product as part of their identity, they can become enrolled in the branding process as co-creators and co-promoters of value (XX et al., 2013). Indeed, whereas branding used to be unidirectional – from the firm to the consumer – these channels are

becoming blurred and consumers are playing a bigger role in physical and virtual spaces (Crewe 2013b). On the streets of Canadian and international cities, consumers donning Canadian fashion become brand ambassadors or 'walking billboards' (XX et al., 2013). Online, consumers can help spread firm-based marketing by sharing or liking social media posts and creating their own promotional content. For example, it is increasingly common to see a fashion firm re-post an image of a customer wearing their product from a customer's public Instagram page. In turn, the customer often responds positively to being showcased by the brand.

While most fashion firms are engaging with consumers, the ability of social media platforms such as Instagram to level the playing field is particularly beneficial to smaller independent brands who lack the economic resources for traditional media campaigns or flagship stores (XX et al., 2013; Crewe 2016). As one designer described:

> "Social media is so important. We don't use any other advertising. It offers an incredible platform to connect with our customers and to inform them about what we are doing. But also, it's a platform for them to inform us of what they're feeling" (personal interview).

Yet, is important to highlight the potential power and peril of enrolling consumers in branding activities. On the one hand, consumers can be a key advantage for firms, as they can play an important role in helping to enhance a brand and spatial entanglements through their use of social media or blogs. However, engaging with consumers can also be unpredictable, as consumers can alter, challenge, circumvent or expose brands and contradictions. For example, just as consumers can leave comments praising a brand, if the quality or style of a garment does not meet the expectation of the consumer, Instagram is a public way for consumers to make their displeasure known.

6.3 *The layering of value*

As innovative place-based strategies are monitored across social media, copied, and potentially rendered less effective, fashion firms face constant pressure to stay one step ahead (XX et al., 2013). While some firms attempt to execute common strategies to a higher standard than their competitors, others attempt to combine layers of value into a more unique and difficult to replicate package. A prominent example of this is the strategic pairing of Canadian manufacturing and Canadian identity in branding. For example, Province of Canada emphasises the true Canadian-ness of their product and their brand because it is actually made in Canada. To enhance their own value while denigrating rivals they imply that being made in Canada is fundamental to the Canadian-ness of any brand. Similarly, Tuck Shop Trading Co. regularly shares behind the scenes images and videos from the Canadian factories where the brand is made on Instagram. They also sell pennants with statements such as, "proudly made in the Great White North".

These types of images and videos allow consumers to visually verify where and under what conditions clothes are made. Despite the growing abundance of information in the marketplace, consumers still often rely more on perceptions and trust than facts. This allows firms to be creative with their claims to consumers but also highlights the delicate balance they must strike to remain authentic and trustworthy. Roots provides a poignant example of this practice: although the brand's value and marketing is heavily based on its Canadian identity and Roots uses 'made in Canada' as a point of distinction when a product is made in Canada, the firm also obscures the fact that much of its clothing is made offshore. Firms and consumers have different thresholds of Canadian-ness. For some, a Canadian product is anything branded as Canadian, while for others the product must be designed, made, and branded as Canadian. This echoes Tokatli's (2014) work on Prada, which suggests that some firms, that believe their brand

image is strong enough, are willing to play with perceptions of place and quality. On the other hand, for independent firms, who may be less-known and/or less-established, transparency and accountability across the production network are far more important as signifiers of quality and differentiation (XX, 2017). Therefore, the layering of value can take many forms and may connect to consumers in different ways.

7. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of intense global competition, this paper explored the ways in which Canadian fashion firms leverage the landscape to generate distinction, value and brand loyalty. Particular attention was paid to unpacking the real and imagined spatial entanglements between places, products and brands that are presented through the social media platform Instagram.

The findings suggest that the Canadian landscape is central to the branding strategies and value propositions of the fashion firms in the sample and can be used to articulate a sense of community at the national, city and/or local neighbourhood scale(s) (Pike 2015). However, elements of this landscape are imagined, presented and narrated in different ways according to the unique backstory, identity and vision of each firm. Whereas the Hudson's Bay Company uses images to remind consumers of its 400-year-old history and retail presence across Canada, Canada Goose associates extreme cold and adventures in rugged landscapes with its high-quality luxury outdoor apparel. Each firm also uses the landscape to connect to or (re)create different conceptualisations of Canadian identity. While some embrace and reinforce popular stereotypes, younger independent firms like Province of Canada are playing with perceptions of Canada and creating new and modern understandings of Canadian-ness, the Canadian landscape and importantly, Canadian fashion.

This paper makes a number of contributions. By bringing together the economic geography literature on place branding and the cultural geography literature on the landscape, this paper nuanced our theoretical understanding of spatial entanglements and place-branding while shifting the focus from the production to the consumption of landscapes (Cosgrove, 2006).

Second, by adapting the work of Rose (2012) to study the Instagram accounts of a purposeful sample of Canadian fashion firms, the paper made a methodological contribution to nascent examinations of social media and visual data sources in geography. Social media provides geographers, and researchers more broadly, with a highly visual, widely accessible, and rich data source, and through providing a detailed methodology, this research shows how the work of Rose (2012) can be applied to new data sources. This use of social media data also reaffirms the importance of the landscape concept in contemporary culture and how it is being represented through different channels over time.

Finally, by focusing on the Canadian case the paper addressed calls to look beyond established fashion capitals and brands and contributed valuable insights into the dynamics of a tier two fashion industry while also shedding light on 'the economics of the digital transition' (Crewe, 2013b). It also provides an approach to studying an image intensive sector in a new way, while expanding the scope of research beyond established brands and places.

This research also raises a number of questions and avenues for future research. Beyond the typical focus on firms and/or intermediaries, there is a need to look at consumption preferences and practices from the perspective of consumers. Moreover, as digital technologies continue to reshape the fashion industry, research could usefully consider whether the resulting democratisation has levelled the playing field for producers or entrenched established brand and location-based hierarchies even further.

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