

# The concept of fashion marketing as an instrument of reducing tensions between designers and marketing experts in fashion companies

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## REZUMAT – ABSTRACT

### Conceptul de marketing de modă ca instrument de reducere a tensiunilor dintre designeri și experții în marketing din companiile de modă

*Tensiunile dintre designeri și experții în marketing din companiile de modă sunt create în mare măsură deoarece valorile de design se opun valorilor marketingului. Printre altele, o mai bună înțelegere a conceptului de marketing de modă, care se bazează pe respectul egal pentru design, clienți și profiturile companiilor de modă, contribuie la limitarea neînțelegerilor. Acest fapt a fost confirmat de cercetările efectuate în țările din Balcanii de Vest.*

*Cuvinte-cheie: tensiuni, designeri, experți în marketing, concept de marketing de modă*

### The concept of fashion marketing as an instrument of reducing tensions between designers and marketing experts in fashion companies

*Tensions between designers and marketing experts in fashion companies are created largely because the design values are opposing to the values of marketing. Among other things, a better understanding of the concept of fashion marketing, which is based on equal respect for design, customers and profits of fashion companies, contributes to the reduction of misunderstanding. It has been confirmed by research carried out in the countries of the Western Balkan.*

*Keywords: tensions, designers, marketing experts, fashion marketing concepts*

## INTRODUCTION

Design integrates functional, ergonomic and aesthetic qualities of products and is an effective instrument of diversity in relation to competitive products. To achieve this, designers must effectively connect these features or aspects of art to the market, in order to create the appropriate product for the previously selected market target.

Therefore, considering the business from the perspective of customers does not exclude the simultaneous interest in profit. Moreover, if there is no active search for profit, the ability of the company to meet customers' needs for a longer period will be significantly reduced.

The authors who have dealt with the study of tension between the design and marketing as key business functions in fashion companies, among others, are: M. Vasiljević [1], H. Bloch Peter [2], B.B. De Mozota [3], J. Bohdanovich, L. Clamp [4], M. Gašović [5], H. Yen [7], Ph. Kotler, L. Keller [9], K. Best [10].

The following authors have especially dealt with the relationship between designers and marketing experts: M. Easey [6], B.M. Beverland [12], D. Zhang [13].

Research results of the mentioned authors point to a pronounced complexity of the fashion market. Such a fact objectively imposes a lot of difficulties to designers and marketing experts, whose activities are very intertwined and dependent on each other.

Tensions between designers and marketing experts have been the subject of the study of the authors of this paper as well. Publications of the mentioned

authors, who did research in this area, were initially considered. That activity has resulted in the synthesis of their views presented through the parts of this paper with the headlines: The views of designers; the views of marketing experts. Then, during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> months of 2015 it was published primary research on a sample of 50 fashion companies in the Western Balkans. It was conducted a survey of designers engaged, as well as the survey of the Heads of Design Departments in larger companies. On the other hand, depth interviews were conducted with 20 marketing experts. Due to the large scope marketing activities covered, it has been discussed with various persons who are directly addressed in cooperation with designers. Interviewed artists are the designers of fashion garments in the field of knitwear, lingerie, denim and, mass market product. They expressed their opinions by answering to ten questions related to: freedom to create, participation in decision making on assortment, perception and the role of marketing, existence of disagreements with marketing experts, causes of the disagreement, etc. Interviewed marketing experts announced their views on: the role of design in product differentiation, misunderstandings with the designers, the causes of these misunderstandings, disagreements when designing price, making the selection of fabrics, the requirements of key customers, validation and acceptance of the results of marketing research, etc. They are engaged in their companies as: consultants of marketing issues, head of marketing departments, independent

associates for marketing issues, sales managers, agents and managers of retail stores.

## **SUBJECT, OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The subject or issue of this paper refers to the misunderstandings between the designers and marketing experts in the fashion companies that produce garments. The operational definition of the subject of research is focused on companies that produce fashion products for the mainstream market in the countries of the Western Balkan.

In this research the authors try to identify the causes of the tensions between the designers and marketing experts, and discover the common ground between their points of view.

Starting from the object and purpose of the research, two hypotheses have been imposed. The first hypothesis is that tensions between the designers and marketing experts are real. The second hypothesis is that their relation and cooperation can be improved by better understanding and implementation of the fashion marketing concept which presupposes equal respect for both designers and marketing experts' views.

Several methods of research were applied in the paper. The initial method used in this research should show the dominant point of view of renowned authors who have discussed the relations between designers and marketing experts in fashion companies. The primary research was done based on sources taken from literature mentioned in Introduction.

The research method authors used is the field research (surveys with designers and interviews with marketing experts) are made in order to collect data and information from primary sources. Other methods presented in this paper are: descriptive method, method of analysis and synthesis, method of concluding, etc.

The method of sample selection for surveys and interviews was conditioned on the size, success, product range. The way how managers and/or owners of the companies treat their designers and marketing experts of their companies has also been a criterion. The sample size of 50 fashion companies in a relatively small region as Western Balkans is truly representative. According to the method of selection, it is a deliberate sample. This sample type was selected because the researchers were familiar with the structure of the fashion market in the Western Balkans.

The respondents were the head designers, leading designers and designers-external associates who were engaged by contract for designing work in fashion companies.

Interviews were realized with 20 marketing experts who had to cooperate with designers because of their unique work position. Most often these were: heads of the marketing departments, consultants for marketing jobs, independent associates for marketing

jobs, sales managers, agents and managers of larger retail stores.

## **THE VIEWS OF FASHION DESIGNERS**

According to M. Vasiljević, author of numerous publications in field of fashion design, fashion products are considered to be a result of a fashion design process [1]. Likewise, designers require that design is seen as an additional attribute that is added to the value of products. There are four key components of products that make up the design of fashion products different from competitors'. In addition to the aesthetic component (shape, colour, style), there is a technical and functional component (functionality, reliability, performance, reversibility) and ergonomic component (comfort). The design of packaging and labels, as an integral part of the overall product design without which products cannot enter the market, is also designers' responsibility. The designers do not mention at all the role of marketing, nor the requirements and desires of customers which can be obtained during marketing activities.

P. Bloch, the author who deals with the relationship between product design and marketing, says that designers emphasise their design principles that have an impact on customers' preference and are the basis for understanding of their aesthetic reaction [2]. The principle of shape of the product is the principle of "unity" or "whole". Many different elements form the shape of the product, and they are all selected and united into a whole by the designer, with the purpose of causing a sensory effect. Designers make decisions, not only on the shape of the products, but also on their size, proportion, material, colour, ornaments, texture, etc., in order to form their optimal combination. These design statements ignore marketing research in terms of customer perception regarding the aesthetic component of design.

According to B.B. De Mozote's research, designers' attitude regarding the brand stands out [3]. They demand that the relationship between design and brand is not reduced exclusively to graphic design, logo or sign. Rather, design is present in all aspects of brand equity: mission, promise, positioning, feeling (expression) and quality. All non-verbal elements of the brand (colour, logo, appearance) can be designed. Graphic design refers to the name and symbol of the brand, while the design of a product is related to its performance. The design of packaging refers to packaging appearance, and interior design refers to the layout of retail stores.

L. Bohdanovich and M. Clamp, famous names in the fashion marketing, claim that top designers create garments of haute couture [4]. This type of products is available only to premium customers and they are offered with other fashion items such as jewellery and cosmetics. These are unique items, mainly produced by the rules determined by the world's fashion centres such as Paris, Milan, London, etc. The originality and quality of these models are guaranteed, and

control is performed by specialized institutions Chambre Syndicale da la Couture Parisienne.

M. Easey, a renowned British author in the field of fashion marketing emphasizes that some designers believe that marketing is just a promotion [6]. Practically speaking, the designers are the real strength and they just need an advertising or effective PR to keep customers or make them discover their creations. The current and potential customers are considered to be persons who should lead and inspire creative clothing that was successfully promoted. Persons who can appreciate the creative clothing are the wealthiest strata of the society. Designers believe that it is necessary to monitor the activities of persons who are presumed to be located at the forefront of creative change (film directors, musicians, artists). Many of great fashion designers represent this stand and lead a successful business.

### THE VIEWS OF MARKETING EXPERTS

M. Gašović [5] warns that marketing experts occasionally experience designers as artists, undisciplined and insensitive to costs and profitability. This stems from the fact that they are first and foremost economists who are trained for the systematic and analytical approach to problems. According to them, the application of marketing involves identifying objectives and specifying the funds invested in the research, production, promotion, sale, etc. Marketing experts believe that success comes as a result of careful research and planning, rather than as a result of spontaneity or ignorance of market reality. They often fail to understand the aesthetic dimensions of design or many qualitative aspects of product development. Also, sometimes they lack awareness of the role of design in business. Marketing experts often treat designers as persons who need to respond to the kind of customer specification as defined by marketing research.

According to B.B. De Mozoti [3], marketing experts expect from the designers to have unique ideas and create products for specific market segments. After that, these products are positioned at the certain segments, but also in the minds of customers. According to this view, access to the positioning defines the creative freedom of the designer in terms of the desired level of differentiation – from completely original to the adapted product. In doing so, the designer can define alternative positioning which correspond to the benefits of certain market segments.

M. Easey [6] points out the view of so-called 'marketing fanatics' who believe that marketing concept is the solution to all business problems, i.e. that its application may pay for failures in the design of products and prevent a decline in profits. Also, they do not recognize the interdependence of operational and creative business functions within the company. Also, marketing fanatics do not understand enough business environment.

The author H. Yen [7] in his research comes to conclusion that there is a close link between Marketing Strategy and Design Strategy. He classifies marketing strategies into four groups: strategy for market leaders, strategy for market challengers, strategy focused on market and strategy focus on market niches. Each of these strategic alternatives suits an adequate strategy, which designers agreed on.

### INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF RESEARCH ON THE VIEWS OF DESIGNERS AND MARKETING EXPERTS IN THE FASHION COMPANIES IN WESTERN BALKANS

The first questions in the questionnaire referred to highlight of the decision-maker about assortment (design solutions) which will be offered to the market. The largest number of respondents, 58% of them, believes that it is the owner or chief director. Designers make decisions in 22% of cases, and marketing experts in 20% of situations. Therefore, managers-entrepreneurs style (who make up the majority), problematic privatization, a painful transition, low purchasing power and a permanent economic crisis, undoubtedly reflect the weak impact of primarily designers in fashion companies in the Western Balkans (figure 1).

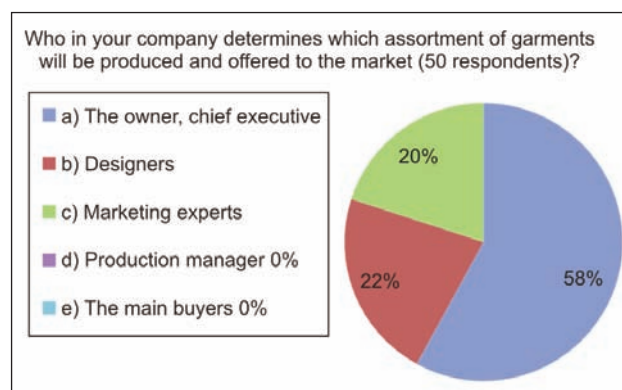


Fig. 1. Decisions-makers about assortment of garments that will be produced and offered to the market

The issue was related to the importance of some of the business functions in the companies in which designers work. The answers are really indicative. In fact, 40% of respondents believe that the design is an important element, while slightly less – 38% of them think it's a marketing function. It is encouraging that the production function is dominant in only 22% of cases. From the above it follows that the design and marketing as business functions, integrated and with reduced tension, can be the powerful force in business strategies of fashion companies (figure 2).

The third question was about the level of creative freedom of designers. Even 66% of respondents believe that they have partial freedom when designing garments. Others, 18%, says they have no freedom, while 16% claimed to have total creative freedom. If the number of designers who have partial

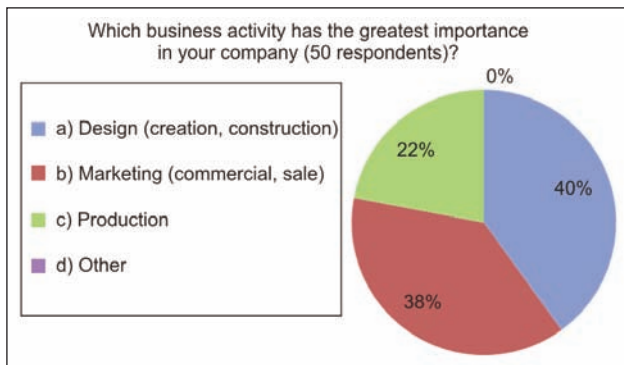


Fig. 2. The business activity that has the greatest importance in companies

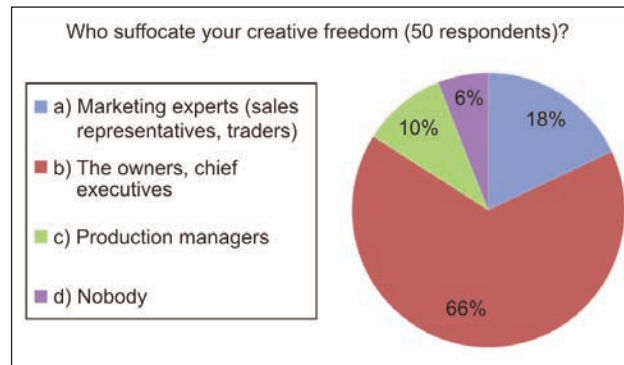


Fig. 4. Persons that suffocate creative freedom in companies

freedom and those who have full autonomy is viewed together, it can be concluded that the creativity of designers and their freedom to create is more and more respected in the fashion companies in the Western Balkans, which is very encouraging (figure 3).

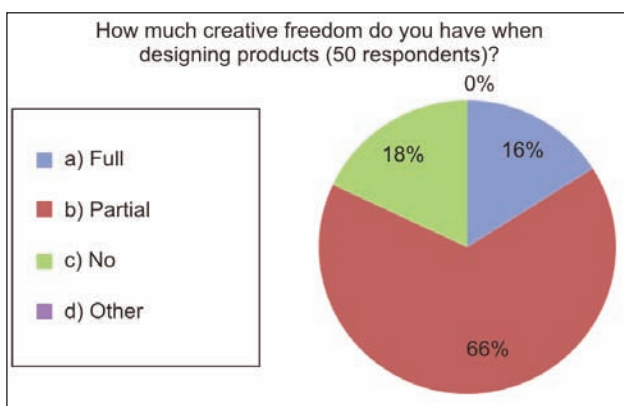


Fig. 3. The level of creative freedom in products designing

Fourth issue is aimed to get an answer of designers on the person in their companies who stifles their freedom and spontaneity in creating garments. A large percentage of respondents, or 60%, believes that those are owners or chief executives. Marketing experts are considered culprits by 18% of designers, and production managers by 10% of them. It is indicative that only 6% of respondents said that no one stifled their creativity. So, it is obvious that the owners (usually the managing directors as well), who are the vast majority of the founders of fashion companies, have not yet left the initial syndrome of entrepreneurs-managers – intended to fully control all the jobs in their own companies (figure 4). Replies of designers to the fifth question, which referred to the understanding of marketing as a whole of activities (product development and branding, pricing, promotion, distribution, sales) were surprisingly positive and accurate. In fact, 96% of respondents believe that marketing is a whole of given activities, and only 4% of them equates it with the sale, which is only one of its functions, the final one by which the full effort of designers and marketing experts, as well

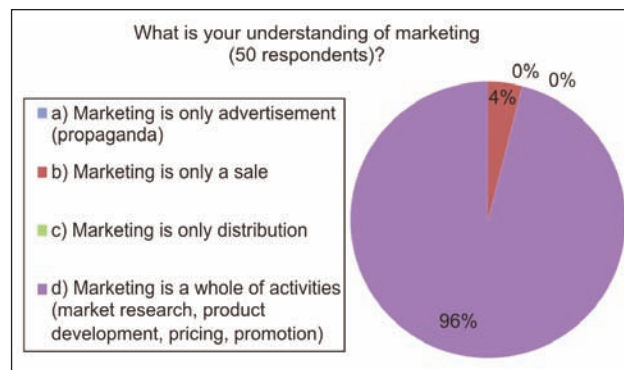


Fig. 5. Understanding of marketing

as other business functions in companies, is realized (figure 5).

The sixth question referred to the disagreement of designers and marketing experts in their companies. About two-thirds of respondents, or 68%, said that the disagreement occurs only in certain specific situations. For the reply “yes” or permanent disagreement was answered by 12%, while 6% of the respondents did not answer the question. Starting from the given answers, it can be cautiously concluded that tensions between marketing experts and designers still exist, but that disagreements are rarely manifested, which is a sign of their reduction (figure 6).

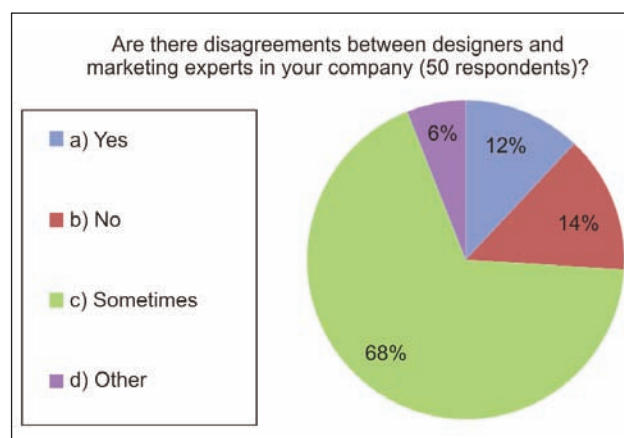


Fig. 6. Existence of disagreements between designers and marketing experts in companies

Question seven asked designers to answer on the causes of their disagreement with marketing experts. More than half of respondents, or 56%, claim that the main reason lies in the unwillingness of marketing experts for market risk when it comes to the adoption of new, original design solutions. For the offered answer that suggests the impossibility of expressing their creative potential through the acceptance of their models, 8% of respondents opted, while 10% of them consider that marketing experts underestimate their knowledge, talent and effort. However, a significant percentage of respondents, 26%, gave a self-critical response about mutual misunderstanding as the cause of disagreement between designers and marketing experts (figure 7).

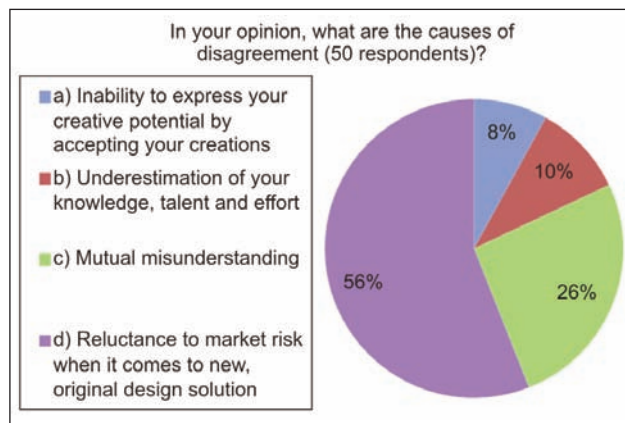


Fig. 7. The causes of disagreement between designers and marketing experts

The question eight referred to the possible existence of awareness of designers on the state in their company and market, when they make decisions on which models will be produced in a series and offered to the market. More than half of respondents, or 54%, think that traders and managers of stores may have a different opinion on their offered models. For the offered answer, that management can warn of high costs and problematic profitability of their creations, opted 32% of respondents. The remaining respondents, or 6%, consider that the cause of rejection of the new models can lie in scepticism of production in terms of technical and technological feasibility of these models. For the answer "Testing of attitudes of large, existing customers are not optimistic" opted only 4% of the respondents (figure 8.).

The question nine referred to the views of designers related to claims of marketing experts that the success on the fashion market requires: careful research, planning, respect for market reality, respect for the competitors and the level of their prices, etc. Almost two thirds of respondents, or 64%, only partially agree with the foregoing, the typical marketing attitude. However, a significant percentage of respondents, or 36%, fully agrees with the views of marketing experts. As it can be seen, most of the designers

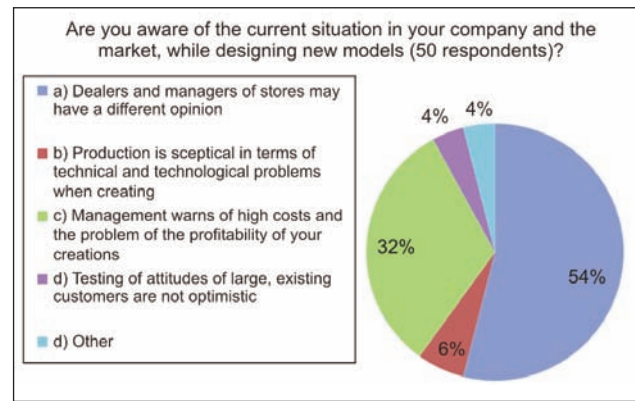


Fig. 8. Terms of designing new models in companies and market

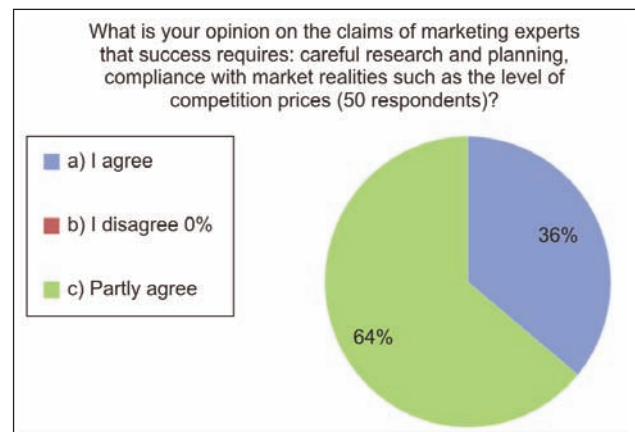


Fig. 9. Claims about requires for success

only partially agree with the statements of marketing experts (figure 9).

The tenth question referred to the views of designers on whether the changes in the educational system of designers (the study of the principles of fashion marketing) and marketing experts (study of design principles) could help in bridging their disagreement. The answers were surprising and encouraging: all 50 designers, therefore 100% of respondents answered affirmatively to the question (figure 10)

The second part of the research was carried out in twenty fashion companies in the Western Balkans. Testing of marketing experts was conducted in the period from October to November 2015. The used technique was the personal-depth interview, which assumes a formal, direct questions and informal conversation. The purpose was to get respondents indicate free views about their disagreements with designers. Direct questions were related to: the role of designers in differentiation of products, the existence of disagreement, the reasons of good cooperation, and misunderstandings with young designers about production material, price, selection of collections for the upcoming season, about the requirements of large customers, the meaning of marketing research, caused by company owners and related to differences in formal education.

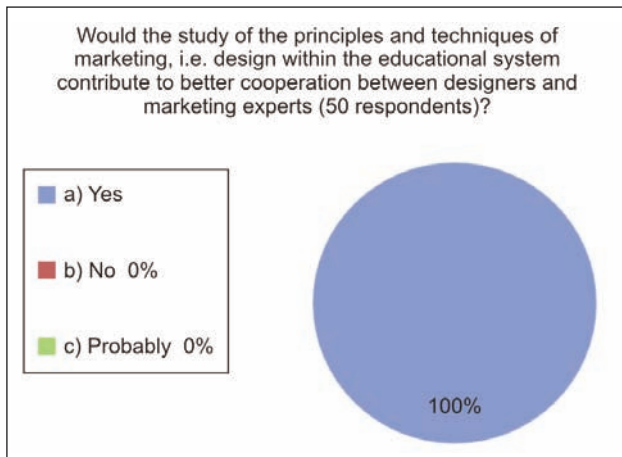


Fig. 10. The agreement on the importance of the principles and techniques of marketing, i.e. design within the educational system in contribution to better cooperation between designers and marketing experts

It has been asked if there is a misunderstanding with the designers with whom they work in their companies, 25% of marketing experts responded negatively. As reasons for the good cooperation and understanding of the experience of designers, their respect for market requirements and specific situations that are told precisely by them have been specified.

The remaining 75% marketing experts draws attention to different (occasional) causes of disagreement with designers. Most complaints (32%) are given to younger designers, because of their pretension or attitude that they need marketing experts only for the promotion of their models and for the offer to customers.

About 23% of respondents state design proposals related to the material for making garments as a reason for misunderstanding. They do not dispute the right of designers in selection of the material, but they point out that the selected material is often too expensive which threatens the planned profitability of these products. In fact, based on the purchasing power of their target customer and the price of similar competing products, they consider that the increase of the final selling price is not possible.

Disagreements are also present at the final evaluation, i.e. selection of models that should be produced in series for next season. 57% of marketing experts think that the applause of the present, selected audience at fashion is not sufficient guarantee for the market acceptance of those models that are carried by mannequins, which is not the designers' opinion. Misunderstandings occur because of the demands and proposals of the key long-standing customers, those bound to both, the design and assortment of garments. Marketing experts consider that these claims should be accepted, and then, after the market testing, necessary redesigning and selection of assortment, should be carried out.

All interviewed marketing experts believe that designers cannot ignore the results of marketing research

as a basis for their creative efforts in the process of fashion designing.

Marketing experts almost completely agree with designers when it comes to excessive interference of companies' owners in their affairs.

Misunderstandings could be reduced if designers acquired more marketing knowledge, and marketing experts learn more about design.

### THE CONCEPT OF FASHION MARKETING AS A POSSIBILITY OF REDUCING TENSIONS BETWEEN DESIGNERS AND MARKETING EXPERT

Fashion marketing can be viewed as a business philosophy that deals with current and potential customers of clothing, as well as with products and services that are related to clothing, with the intention to achieve long-term goals of fashion companies [5].

The concept of fashion marketing should include positive aspects of high interest in design, customers and profit, admitting the existence of interdependence between marketing and design.

Tensions between designers and marketing experts can be reduced if designer realize that marketing can improve the creative process, and if marketing experts accept the fact that in fashion industry design may, in addition to compliance with customer requirements, dictate these requirements. Marketing experts may produce a bunch of information on customers' requirements, and analyze the offered illustrations, but cannot develop detailed specifications for design of fashion products. Marketing used in the fashion industry has to respect the role of design [9].

Reducing tensions between designers and marketing experts would help the greater appreciation of post-modern society and its culture. In this sense, designers are increasingly creating products that are not defined by a function, but its identity. At the same time, an equal role in deciding on purchase have both a product and its image, i.e. and public image.

Application of the concept of modern marketing assumes review of curricula according to which designers and marketing experts are traditionally educated. Marketing students must study the process of product design. Design students have to know the key principles of marketing, especially of fashion marketing that affirms their position in fashion companies [9].

The concept of fashion marketing assumes close relationship between marketing strategy and design strategy. It is necessary to harmonize marketing experts and designers for each strategic option individually.

For the success of the concept of modern marketing the crucial thing is integration of marketing and design in the process of development of a new product. By making the use of the product easier and its performance better, designers contribute to the differentiation

of products and attracting customers. Marketing experts provide information to designers on the needs of customers, competition and problems in existing products. Working together with marketing experts, designers can generate and visualize ideas that are sent to check. When the idea is visually presented, marketing experts, together with the designers consider the decision and discuss whether it is feasible. In the later stages of product development process, marketing experts test new models and collections before launching them into production. New models must be secured by the designer. Marketing experts have the responsibility of providing information, feedback and recommendations to designers.

One of the complex activities of the fashion marketing is foresight. However, designers and marketing experts need to be aware that some changes in the business environment and activities of competing firms cannot be fully predicted. They both know that the fashion industry is known for its high rate of failure of new products, as well as regular discounts for designed products that could not be sold in the period of the main season.

Failures are partly a reflection of the high risk that characterizes the fashion market. They may also be a result of inadequate application of the concept of fashion marketing. However, practice shows that proper application of fashion marketing reduces uncertainty in the fashion industry and reduces the number of business failures [10].

## CONCLUSION

Tensions between designers and marketing experts in choosing the range of garments for the market are certainly the consequence of distinct values in which they believe, shortcomings in their formal education, years of experience, the structure of the fashion market, etc.

There are also the areas in which designers and marketing experts have the undivided attitude about values. Successful designers and marketing experts agree that succeed requires careful preparation and implementation of professional skills, they understand the importance of communication even though they attach greater importance to their visual aspect.

They tend to agree on the functional component of garments design.

Conducted research shows some specifics in views of designers of the Western Balkans related to their position in the fashion companies, and even mild tendency toward understanding the point of view of marketing experts. Fashion designers of the Western Balkans bother the owners-managers, who sometimes make all the decisions by themselves, even those concerning which new models will be produced and offered in the market. They expect from marketing experts timely information on fashion trends, customers' reactions to their models, insight into the results of the final sales to end customers, the level of competitive prices, etc. Similarly, marketing experts can help designers in creating a profile of customers at the predetermined target market. They believe that the misunderstandings between the designers and marketing experts can be reduced by better mutual communication, as well as by changes in educational programs in both areas.

The views of marketing experts engaged in fashion companies in the Western Balkans, generally speaking, do not differ from those found in the literature. From the knowledge obtained through the interviews with 20 marketing experts, it can be noted a significant increase of appreciation of the role of the designer. However, they, as well as designers, complain about the non-compliance of risk and misunderstanding of the owners-managers. The main issues on which they disagree with designers include: reduction of marketing only to promotion, lack of appreciation for the results of marketing research, the role of large customers, pretentiousness of young designers, the selection of new models, the selection of materials, lack of sensitivity to costs, etc.

Application of the concept of fashion marketing can greatly reduce misunderstandings between the designers and marketing experts. The concept basically has equal appreciation of design and marketing, creative freedom and market reality, inspiration of designers and calculations of marketing experts. In a word, according to the concept of fashion marketing, designers must take into account the logic of profit, while marketing experts must pay attention to their emotions, which are the basis for that "something" that makes new creations specific.

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