COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

Paloma Díaz Soloaga
pdiaz@ccinf.ucm.es
Professor. Communication
Department. Complutense
University of Madrid. Spain

Leticia García Guerrero
garciaguerreroleticia@gmail.com
Lecturer in International and
National Fashion Industry
Panorama. University Center
Villanueva. Spain

Fashion films as a new communication format to build fashion brands

Abstract

The consolidation of collaborative video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo in recent years has significantly changed the way fashion brands communicate with their audiences. Fashion films have emerged as a new and revolutionary tool adopted by luxury brands at the start of the XXI Century to construct their brands. A sample of 62 fashion films from 2006 to 2016 was analyzed in order to describe fashion film's anatomy and its main characteristics that constitute an especial type of branded content, originated by brands in their quest for exclusivity and authenticity. As a distinctive type of experiential marketing mostly used by luxury fashion brands, they would become a new communication strategy for mainstream brands, but also allow the discovery of a profound connection with consumers through audiovisual narration.

Keywords
Fashion film, branding, branded content, fashion communication, experiential marketing, luxury brands

1. Introduction

Modern fashion magazines, as we know them today, started in the last decades of the XIX century and the fashion ads in these magazines, with their images and proposals, have shown the way women should look and perform for decades (Stoll Dougall, 1994: 49). Fashion brands used to remain within the safe boundaries of editorials: a visual report where a model is presented wearing different outfits, following a specific theme or concept. Economic factors were the main reason behind these decisions: during the first decade of the XX century two editorial companies, Condé Nast and Hearst Corporation, found a way to capitalize the huge growth of the cosmetics and fragrances advertising industry. But the predominant role they allocated to photographers placed these professionals as a key agent in the origins of the entire fashion brands' system (Casajús Quirós, 2002: 133-147). They felt comfortable with static images where models and outfits were equally important to control.

Besides, although fashion magazines' advertising rates are expensive they are more accessible than those of audiovisual media

such as television and film. However, these are not the sole reason for which fashion brands have chosen print instead of audiovisual advertising formats. The fact that target groups are heavily concentrated around fashion magazines, in addition to the quality and specialization of contents turns them into an ideal place for brand advertising (Menéndez Menéndez, 2009: 27–34).

In recent years, the communication sector has evidenced that conventional formulas such as advertising rates in television, radio, magazines and newspapers, cinema, billboards and even the Internet, have been surpassed in investment by unconventional communication. At the same time, traditional advertising had been undergoing a deep credibility crisis at the beginning of the new century but it dramatically improved during the economic and financial crisis from 2008 to 2014. Furthermore, Integrated Marketing Communication research confirms that this lack of authority is motivated by scarce or nonexistent brand commitment and by limited interest in establishing an open dialogue with the consumer (Holm, 2006: 23-33).

Although it is true that traditional communication channels have demonstrated their effectiveness for years, brands have likewise realized they cannot ignore radical transformations in the current communications scenario. This is the case of fashion film that "as a new form of high gloss representation, [...] has challenged more traditional forms of fashion media" (Khan, 2012: 236). On the other hand, quoting Uhlirova (2013: 147)

> The designers' growing interest in the moving image was of course propelled by the technological possibilities –the now easily accessible electronic and digital production techniques and editing equipment- but also, and perhaps more importantly, coincided with the shift of the fashion show towards a theatrical spectacle, a multimedia, multisensory experience that was to forcefully impress upon the audience the concept and the creative process behind a collection.

For all these reasons fashion brands started to look for a different way to communicate with their customers and tell them something relevant that can't be transmitted on a piece of paper or across a fashion show. In the first decade of the XXI Century –besides some exceptions- fashion brands started to use audiovisual content more than ever as a strategic tool to express their identity.

But this does not mean that fashion didn't feel the attraction of moving image during the XX century. Uhlirova (2013: 140) identifies a film made by Georges Méliès for Mysthère corsets as one of the first fashion films ever. And Leese (1991: 9) cites *Fifty years of Paris fashions, 1859-1909* shown in London in 1910 as the first fashion film, even though we can say that because of the function and characteristics they both were conceived as commercial ads.

Newsreels projections from the 10's to the 30's showing the latest collections from Paris mostly to the American customers could also be cited as a precedent of the fashion films. During those years newsreels genre did not change very much (Leese, 1991).

Short films become more and more popular through the years. Some of them were mere exhibitions of a designer's collection, but other's main goal was to show new trends of each season or a product's manufacturing process. After the II WW some fashion films showed the revolutionary use of the new fabrics such as nylon or rayon. From the 30's to the 50's the Hollywood Golden Era have a strong influence on the fashion newsreels with many actresses starring as models and the more frequent use of narrative.

It is necessary to mention the photographer Erwim Blumenfeld as the pioneer of the fashion experimental movies during the 50's and 60's. William Klein and Guy Bourdin also contributed with "short films as an extension of their photographic work" from the 60's to the 80's. And again some great fashion photographers like Richard Avedon, Serge Lutens

and Helmut Newton made fashion films for commercial brands during the 70'a and 80's (Mijovic, 2013: 145). In the two last decades of the last century television was more open to elaborate programs dedicated to fashion at the beginning of the new century, fashion designers incorporated audiovisual contents to their fashion shows and stores. At the same time, a more conceptual approach was present in the short films and documentaries with fashion as the center (2013: 146).

But the new version of fashion films that emerged in the first decade of XXI century –as a result of the digital revolution has created a different form of expression, art, branding and strong connection with communities– allow us to talk about a totally distinct phenomenon.

2. Some facts about fashion and branding

The fashion brands universe is atomized and there are tons of local and international brands competing against each other. In order to stand out, brands need a differential proposition. During the 80's emerged the lifestyle brand communication idea as a plausible way to tell a story that customers can quickly understand and feel identified with (Wickstrom, 2006: 2-4). Nowadays more than a logo to show, people look for a lifestyle to follow (Saviolo & Marazza, 2013: 60) and audiovisual, without any doubt, is the perfect language to transmit a lifestyle.

On the other hand, the amount of fashion related advertising videos has soared exponentially in the last six years. Whilst in 2009, videos or advertising documentaries were very few and in 2016 it is unconceivable for a fashion brand to ignore this promotion channel in its campaigns. Along with this trend the recent consolidation of collaborative video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo –created in 2006 and 2004 respectively– has significantly changed the way fashion brands communicate with their audiences. This is not only due to technical possibilities but also to influencers that spread around their personal choices to others.

The *fashion film* concept is used in the industry to indicate creative audiovisual projects produced for fashion brands. The purpose of this article is to study fashion films in order to identify the main characteristics of this new genre that fashion corporations are using to communicate and build brands.

There are some factors concerning the industry that must be analyzed before in order to understand the importance of fashion film. Fashion used to be a sector mainly based on brick and mortar retail, the initial intention was to sell clothes, shoes, bags and accessories. Physical stores were, during the XIX and the XX centuries, the main distribution channel to purchase clothes, but the end of the XX century saw the emergence of a new type of retail: flagship stores. Fashion flagships emerged as special stores, bigger and more singular than any other brand's store. Often designed by reputed architects and placed in the best city locations flagships intention was to create a lifestyle environment: a "brandscape" whose goal was to facilitate the customer to identify with the world of the brand (Wickstrom, 2006). They intend to attract attention through all five senses and hence become a stage that recreates each brand's exclusive universe. Theatricality used as a seduction tool to obtain a large scale sensorial impact: entering a Gucci, Armani, Carolina Herrera or Prada flagship stores, means access to extremely singular environments: the display of lifestyles. The products are not as important as the place itself and the broad variety of activities they offer related to culture, art, music, events or digital experiences to mention some.

Flagship stores started as a result of factors such as the importance of developing a whole concept in the stores to transmit the brand lifestyle to consumers to mention one. The growth of ecommerce was another reason. The internationalization of fashion brands was the third, since consumers travel, they encounter brands in other countries and need to

understand in just one store visit what a brand is about to be able to follow and even e-buy their products (Manlow & Nobbs, 2013: 53).

Even though physical stores still mean the 70% or 80% of the global retail sales (McKinsey, 2015), luxury fashion brands have noticed a decrease and stores have become spaces to live experiences or simply product showcases, instead of selling points. Now they are placing efforts on interaction with clients and linking store contents to online social networks and channels, where users express opinions and participate in brand creation.

In flagship stores consumers become "brand performers" or "actors" of a performance that, thanks to mimesis, lead them to get into a totally different world of exclusiveness (Wickstrom, 2006: 13). Ralph Lauren flagship store in New York is one of the best examples of this process.

Based on these evidences brands have discovered the advantages of fashion films and their power of seduction as they secure a more engaging and collaborative experience than television advertisements. However, the most interesting fact is that their main goal is not persuasion; thus they are not oriented towards selling but towards branding. In fact, fashion films are a modern substitute of the use of retail experiences in terms of brand's image creation.

For all these reasons we can say that fashion film is not just a new way of advertising but a form of branded content (Ramos & Pineda, 2009: 729) and an online promotional short film that fashion brands use as a part of their online and marketing branding strategy (Mijovic, 2013: 176).

3. Objective, research questions and methodology

This article main goal is to describe the fashion films as a new format to create brands: to perform an anatomy of them, in order to identify its functions, characteristics and digital behavior. Even though we selected, reviewed and analyzed 62 fashion films this is not an experimental work but a theoretical work based on qualitative study.

The tree research questions of this investigation are:
- Which are the main reasons for the emergence of fashion films?
- Is fashion film a distinctive way of communication for fashion brands? and,
- Which are the main functions and characteristics of fashion films?

To describe this phenomenon we have viewed 254 fashion films from 2000 to 2016, and selected 62 short films classified by brands, directors and years[1].

Our analysis has followed these steps:
1. Definition of the type of fashion film:
    - Narrative, non-narrative, description of a process: production, manufacturing, historic heritage...
2. Main objective of the fashion film:
    - Build brand, present a new product/collection/series, connect with the consumer, improve selling.
3. Pursue of aesthetic delight through:
    - Beauty or Ugliness.
4. Use of audiovisual platforms and/or social media:
    - YouTube, Vimeo, Twitter, Facebook.
5. Analysis of the brand's (product and or values) presence in the fashion film
    - Intrusive, manifest, delitescent, non-existent.
6. Narrative analysis of each fashion film.

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[1] Fashion film selection available in Complutense Brands Research Group Webpage
http://gestiondemarcas.ccinf.es/

After this first analysis and based in our previous researches (Díaz Soloaga & García, 2013: 349-371) we proceed to the qualitative study of the main features of the fashion films. Working with the sample we identified five aspects that define fashion films features and goals:

    a. Strong connection with experiential marketing
    b. A new way to interact with the new digital consumers
    c. Storytelling and serialization
    d. Seek of aesthetic delight
    e. Dematerialization of the products

4. Fashion film definition and main characteristics

A fashion film is a new form of communication mainly used by fashion brands that is the heir of audiovisual advertisements, film, short films, video clips and video art. It could be defined as a form of branded content (Del Pino & Castelló: 2015) and a consequence of the way consumers behave in the XXI century in response to the digital revolution.

Branded content exists since the 30's of the past century but now it has a very different appearance from the initial content sponsored by commercial brands. For the Branded Content Marketing Association, branded content, also called Advertiser Fund Programming, has a little bit of branded entertainment, native advertising, product placement, sponsorship and brand licensing (BCMA, 2015).

Conventional advertising is undergoing a profound crisis, both as a communication format controlled by the sender and in its functional structure –of advertising agencies and communication media–, however, this does not imply that persuasive communication is obsolete (Müller & Michelis, 2011).

Brands still need to create a strong image of their identity in their customers' mind. It must be mainly created through communication and it might include a reference to its heritage. Aspiration and desire "to belong to something" are a core aspect of the decision making process of luxury products and for this reason fashion *Maisons* were the first that started to use digital communications in a different way.

We assume that fashion films is the natural evolution that fashion luxury brands need to do in the digital era, forced by the digital behavior of the young consumers, and distinctive type of experiential marketing.

Referred to the form, the fashion film "has inherited the principles of the traditional fashion media – it celebrates fashion for its incessant creative energy, for its conceptual and artisan qualities, for its transformative potential in the arena of social identity, or as an instrument for the expression of individuality" (Mijovic, 2013: 183) but still there is something new in this communication tool that makes fashion companies use it as a form of building their brands in the digital era:

    1. Fashion films are mostly produced by luxury fashion firms as a new form of experience through entertainment and seduction, as a manifestation of experiential marketing.
    2. Fashion film establishes a new relationship with consumers, closer and more intimate than any other communication strategy, due to the digital formats' interactive possibilities.
    3. Storytelling and serialization of fashion films are some of the most recurrent sources to build brand engagement.
    4. Fashion film seeks an aesthetic delight, through the use of beauty, balance, surprise and harmony, as a way of achieving a profound impact on the consumer.

5. Fashion film dematerialize products and set them apart from their physical characteristics but paradoxically, fashion products can also became a real and subjective element with their own life and personality.

4.1. *Fashion film and experiential marketing*

Atwal and Williams (2009: 345) defined experiential marketing by its main objectives.

> First, the focus is on customer experiences and lifestyles, which provide sensory, emotional, cognitive and relational values to the consumer. Second, there is a focus on creating synergies among meaning, perception, consumption and brand loyalty. Third, it is argued that customers are not rational decision-makers, but are rather driven by rationality and emotion.

Experiential marketing according to Pine and Gilmore (1998: 97) is configured through theatrical acts that showcase these experiences. For Hackley and Tiwsakul (2006: 63-75) there is a link between "the role that entertainment marketing techniques may play in facilitating consumer self-concepts and identity formation through brand exposure within dramatic portrayals of characters and lifestyles". Michault (2009) and Michauld (2015) affirm that the concept of luxury has lost the sense of authenticity and therefore it pursues hyper-reality and is oriented towards experiences, luring consumers with interactivity, connectivity and a great creativity in terms of image. Chanel, Dior and Louis Vuitton have been pioneers in introducing the fashion film notion in collaboration with famous directors. But besides H&M, which has been using audiovisual commercials since 2006, no other mass market fashion brand has used fashion film until 2013 or 2014. Fashion films are definitely a typical branding tool for luxury brands and we will explain the reason why.

When applied to the digital world, experiential marketing is faced with the challenge of making the audience reach a kinesthetic experience, that is, enabling customers to experience senses in an unaccustomed manner, such as "touching" the quality of fabrics with sight or smelling, catching a scent visually (Schmitt, 2006). Nowadays it is not sufficient for luxury brands to create an aura of exclusivity. Customers want to become part of a luxury brand's universe and feel authorized to do so, since currently it is not necessary to belong to an aristocratic social class or to an elite group to participate in their community.

In addition to hiring prestigious film directors, famous actresses and using French visual references –mostly Paris- , music and language, there are two other constant features in luxury brands' audiovisual productions: a aesthetic reminiscent of their aristocratic values and showing the artisan manufacturing process.

The screening of big budget short films is a strategy to encourage desires as well as to gain massive diffusion of contents that are prone to criticism and subject to widespread online sharing. The fact that various fashion brands have their own Facebook page and are closer to the consumer through interaction with clients does not necessarily imply product democratization, quite the contrary.

The renewal in 2005 of Burberry's formerly decadent image and the creation of Burberry Prorsum have placed it amongst the most respected luxury brands in a few years. The British brand's main strategy has been to plunge into digital branding both on a commercial scale and on a content level. Actions such as the Art of the Trench platform; the promotion of video clips by emerging British music groups, the release of 3D runway shows and a Facebook forum to create debate around its digital content creation have all together helped to turn Burberry into a young, well-known, desired brand. Burberry's prices have risen from those of an affordable luxury brand to premium luxury pricing. The democratization of brand information and its usage of fashion film have not resulted in the democratization of the brand, quite the opposite. Luxury brands plan to maintain expectation and speculation across viral marketing that caused by these new audiovisual

contents. Short film series such as *Lady Dior*; teaser campaigns to announce releases and the fact of presenting these in prestigious festivals boosts expectation and encourages social media users to create related content.

4.2. *A new way to communicate with the consumer*

Branding, considered as the effort to create a brand across each and every possible point of contact of the company with the customer, has conceptually replaced traditional advertising. Branding holds a legitimate first place within intangible assets' management in business. In the case of fashion brands, this fact has been enhanced by the huge increase of e-commerce in its multiple versions: from online purchases in brands' websites to buying stock products of luxury brands as well as fashion buying across multi-brand channels. In any case for some brands online product, sales are high compared with a physical store, and there are few brands that do not currently sell products digitally. This phenomenon is particularly challenging for luxury brands whose experiential and symbolic functions are essential.

The evolution from the physical space to the digital milieu has required a profound change from a merely transactional, passive brand–client relationship to an interactive, holistic one. Internet navigation is mostly fragmentary, and users constantly jump from one content to another, seeking entertainment. At the same time consumers are also open to collaborate with the brands if these appear to be amiable and open. But luxury hasn't been benevolent and open for centuries so, why have they changed their behavior?

The answer lies within the medium itself. Internet is an interactive medium and fashion film is the proper way to facilitate a use of interaction without betraying its essence. Although Internet is a medium that lacks the seductive dimension of the purchasing ritual at a physical store that allows users to acquire detailed information about products, however is a persuasive channel itself due to its interactive nature. Features such as active search, participation and the ability to transmit information across different formats, allow consumers to get involved in a brands' universe, enjoy varied experiences around it and above all, feel an individualized and personalized experience.

At a time in which the luxury market must forcefully enter e-commerce, fashion brands are obliged to find new channels to transmit their values, since Internet's operational traits threaten the appearance of exclusivity and excellence attainable in physical stores.

No matter how much Internet enables users to get involved with brands and allows the expression of opinions, the luxury world still cultivates an aspirational relationship with customers. For a luxury brand to remain considered as such it must never fall back to customers' interests, on the contrary it must encourage them to embrace their brand's own contents (Bastien & Kapferer, 2008: 37-40). These brands exert a successful seduction because it is elusive, unattainable.

Diane Pernet, founder of A Shaded View on fashion film, the leading festival for fashion films, states that luxury consumers are realizing much faster than most brands that fashion film is one of the best ways to capture and distribute the elusive power of fashion (Davies, 2010). By screening narratives that represent their core values, brands show their universe, tell their story and provoke clients; in some cases across beauty, others through irony and appealing to connoisseurs of the brand. Sometimes brands even foster community creation and allow customers to become involved in the lifestyle proposed.

Buzz marketing around certain fashion film releases makes the consumer feel the need of more participation. The controversy created by the *Serie Oro* campaign of Loewe in 2012 is an example of this need to judge the brand. The video Lanvin launched for its autumn 2011/2012 campaign, quickly turned into a global *trending topic* in Twitter. This allowed users

who had never heard of Lanvin to have a first contact with the brand through a social network. Surprisingly Lanvin and Loewe videos were viewed by millions of people and commented upon because of the extensive criticism they had received. For many real or potential clients, these campaigns meant a sort of "image devaluation" of prominent luxury brands. To take the risk of interaction with the consumer means the danger of criticism but the benefit of real trust.

Fashion, as well as luxury is defined by its power of seduction (Lipovetsky, 1990: 37) and therefore its communication must be based on the classic rhetoric notion of *pathos*; presenting emotional arguments centered on stirring the recipient. The aim is to appeal to the viewer's imagination and desire, not to convince with rational arguments on product convenience. Above all, fashion films are about making the customer receive a personalized, customized message, even though the content is centered on values and ideals of collective imagination.

The ability of content sharing, fashion show's comments, ad campaigns and interaction with fashion brands, has turned consumers into valuable prosumers (Kotler, 1986: 510-513), i.e. consumers and producers of brand information. Some even influence the fashion sphere, that's why fashion industry is increasingly more alert to expectations and criticism of industry outsiders, such as bloggers and opinion leaders.

Currently, 81% of online shoppers have received advice from friends, 71% read forums and opinions of products available across the web (Baker Retailing Institute, 2013). Brands are doing a big effort to get closer to the consumer and at the same time keep their aspirational universe intact.

4.3. *Storytelling and serialization*

As Diane Pernet says: "What makes a good fashion film is what makes any good film" (BOF, 2012). So in order to communicate, the narrative characteristics of film seem just as necessary as the expressive potential.

Mijovic (2013: 183) states there are three different types of fashion film: the "non-narrative", those that are a sort of magazine editorials with movement; the "conventional narrative", focused on fashion as an aspirational symbol and the "organic narrative" where clothing is the center of the plot and the features and movements of the garments are essential. But we annotate Mijovic, in the sense that even the non-narrative and organic fashion films may include storytelling and serialization.

An excellent story is the key to successfully seduce viewers and to engage them. In addition, for many directors and brands, storytelling has to adjust to a clear classic narrative line. Any fashion film over two minutes needs to have some form of narrative in order to keep the viewer engaged.

Fashion brands often hire film directors and photographers to produce their short films instead of industry professionals. They claim that the power and effectiveness of seduction results from empathy, from the viewer's immersion into an imaginary world, as is the case of classic films. This is clearly illustrated in the *Lady Dior* short film of *Chanel Nº 5* in which Nichole Kidman wants to escape her select celebrity ambiance to live anonymously with the man she loves.

Fashion film main characters frequently are well-known public figures such as Marion Cotillard, Nicole Kidman, Natalie Portman and Riana that become brand ambassadors, mediators between the brand and its audience. They have an evident seductive and aspirational function.

As we mentioned before branded content is a thriving trend in the online marketing world that mixes advertising with entertainment in order to provoke an emotional connection with real and potential customers. In this case, products are not emphasized and

sometimes neither is the logo or other physical attributes of the brand (Hudson & Hudson, 2006: 490). Persuasion is hidden behind exciting images and the suggestion of purchase is "fictionalized" through brand's stories. In a milieu such as Internet, where contents are actively searched, emotional connection is the key to consumption because luxury products cannot use the same mixture of communication channels as in a physical store.

One of the first fashion brands that started using storytelling as a narrative resource was Louis Vuitton in the late 1990s when it began selling travel guides. Although these did not have any direct relationship with classic products of Vuitton, they highlighted the idea of travel, a core value of the famous suitcase and handbags brand. In 2011, *Nowness*, the online fashion film website of LVMH turned these fashion guides into a series of videos with its own Facebook forum, *The Art of Travel*, in which anybody can embrace the "traveler spirit" of Vuitton and comment personal impressions.

Although storytelling was formerly associated with folkloric narrations and popular stories, as a tool that is widely exploited by branding, it does not necessarily imply oral narration (Fog, Budtz, Munch & Blanchette, 2003: 28).

Storytelling is an effective communication tool because it is broadly speaking an extrapolation of a distinctive human characteristic –narration– to the marketing field. Paul Ricoeur (1996: 147-148) would say that human identity is built through the narration of our own story, selecting facts and linking them according to a plot. The coherence of the narration thus creates a character's identity. This is one of the reasons for the deep enjoyment of video and film watching.

Mythos is a necessity of turning texts into interwoven narrations, organized by the classic scheme of presentation, climax and outcome. Even though fashion films do not strictly have to be based on myths, they are also narrations that have a function: to convey significance. They provide meaning to our identity and in the consumption field, they give sense to the act of buying a specific product. But still myths create and transmit narrative outlines and archetypes that become part of popular belief and which therefore, the receiver can recognize and understand almost automatically. Characters such as the hero, the villain, the adventurer or the innocent and values such as honor, revenge, liberty, rebellion or innocence lie underneath the stories that certain brands propose.

Karl Lagerfeld's short film presentations of Chanel collections always play around a plot based on rebellion, which is usually attributed to upper class youth. In the case of *Don't steal the jacket*, a short film produced by Bruce Weber for Moncler, children's innocence in stealing a jacket is portrayed as a serious crime.

These values previously mentioned are universally recognizable. In addition, if we take into account that branded content is shown through storytelling, the values presented in fashion films –and not merely the products- become another character in the plot.

Lady Dior is a short film series starring Marion Cotillard, which Chanel launched in 2009 to promote the famous bag named likewise. The first film in the series, *Lady Noire Affaire*, directed by Olivier Dahan, is a story based on Hitchcock's movies in which Cotillard hires a private detective to find a lost lover. *Lady Rouge*, by Jonas Akerlund is a short film in which Marion performs a song by Franz Ferdinand. In *Lady Grey London*, by John Cameron Mitchell, she is a cabaret dancer who escapes from two of her devoted admirers. In the thriller *Lady Blue Shanghai*, by David Lynch, Marion arrives to the city to discover the whereabouts of her lover. Lastly *Enter the game* by Marion Cotillard and Elliot Bliss shows the same actress defying gravity, hopping across the surface of water and performing dance moves. In all the series' films Marion Cotillard carries a Lady Dior handbag of the same color as indicated in each film's title. The handbag plays a distinctive role in each short movie as does each city, all of them important locations for Dior.

Serialization is also another common resource among fashion films. To mention some: *The Art of Travel*, Louis Vuitton; *Lady Dior*, Dior; *Art of the Trench*, Burberry and *Women's*

Tales, Miu Miu. On the one hand, it allows the plotline to be developed in detail and on the other it attracts the support of viewers through the expectation created around each next episode release.

The majority of fashion films double the time of conventional video advertising but since they are distributed online, each viewer consciously decides when to see it. The full length of the 4 episodes of *A Rose Reborn* created in 2014 to Ermenegildo Zegna is 19:26 minutes, and the above mentioned *Don't steal the jacket*. Moncler's fashion film has a length of 28 minutes. In addition, fashion films' storytelling refers to the essential values of a brand so they manage to bring across the brand's aura by offering the viewer an aesthetic experience or a memorable intellectual thrill. Through these film stories, a luxury brand makes the customer yearn to participate in its exclusive universe. Therefore, fashion films are a strategy closer to seduction than to persuasion.

This is the case of the Salvatore Ferragamo 8 chapter's romantic comedy directed by Luca Guadagnino and actress Kaya Scodelario. The action happens in three cities around the world: the brand's base in Florence; Los Angeles, where Ferragamo dressed Hollywood starlets during the 1920s; and Shanghai, where the brand celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2008. Some episodes attracted over 100,000 views, a major improvement on the few hundred views that the brand previously received in traditional ad campaigns.

The viewer has a sense of belonging to a brand's universe mostly through stories that seduce. For this reason, as soon as we enter a luxury brand's website we encounter fashion films and videos of the latest runway collections. Suzy Menkes (2010) considers that a brand's short film productions are "a way to bring emotion and visual excitement to branding for the YouTube generation". In other words, it is a way to attract user's attention in a medium saturated with information and product exposition.

Overall, luxury's digital branding is focused on communicating to large audiences to maintain the desire of distinction through knowledge. The bigger the buzz around a brand, the more viewers will want to be informed about it and express opinion about its campaigns, collections and videos. The so called *YouTube Generation*, which includes Internet and tech savvy youth users, with high spending power, searches of innovative content as well as products with quality and tradition. Strategies such as fashion film set sociological barriers rather than financial ones: immersion into a brand's universe creates specialized *connoisseurs*, aesthetic critics, users who are literate in certain brand values. Especially in the case of contemporary, niche brands such as Proenza Schouler and Thom Browne.

Above all, fashion films bring together all the contents that brands have placed in various digital platforms. The storylines or the concepts proposed tends to summarize the different collections, campaigns or news that are fragmented across different media and communication channels. After all, in an online medium full of active consumers eager to become brand ambassadors, any flaw or incoherence in brand communication implies a huge mistake in terms of brand reputation.

Since currently brand products and services are exposed to absolute public scrutiny, brands must reinforce core identity values, so fashion brands have discovered that short film productions are an effective way to transmit these core values. Storytelling is a suitable tool to convince viewers who view films voluntarily and therefore do not consider them to be intrusive like traditional media.

4.4. *Aesthetic delight*

The short film *L'Odysée* by Cartier, released in March 2012 has had more than 18 million visits in YouTube in February 2016. It tells the adventure of a leopard-shaped jewel that comes alive and must travel the world to reunite with its owner. This iconic Cartier animal

crosses different emblematic places: Russian Steeps, the Sahara Dessert, the Black Forest, until it reaches Paris, the birthplace of the brand. The film's aesthetics mixes a XIX century setting with dreamlike universes, fantasy animals and iconic places. The values of excellence and grandeur that Cartier stands for acquire their maximum expression in this short film. The aesthetic delight thus becomes a total immersion into the brand universe, and tries to create the desire of possessing the same beauty.

In other cases, it makes the customer feel integrated in the brand creation process, sometimes even feeling ownership of the brand as happens with Hermes and Loewe to mention two international luxurious fashion brands. The same occurs in the previously mentioned *Art of Travel* by Louis Vuitton or in *Art of the Trench* platform launched by Burberry Prorsum, which shows videos of anonymous people wearing the famous trench coat alongside video clips of the trendiest music groups of the moment.

Some luxury brands such as Dior, Chanel, Hermes, Loewe or Louis Vuitton usually pursue beauty, elegance, charm, harmony and, sometimes, happiness, kindness, beauty and sophistication. Whether using a plot with characters or if describing the artisan process of the products, in both cases the main goal is to show aesthetics and authenticity.

SHOWstudio, the website owned by Nick Knight is a crucial reference point for the fashion film concept that offers an innovative creative territory for fashion brands. Since its foundation in 2000, SHOWstudio has acquired a prominent place as a fashion laboratory. It exerts a wide influence among artists, stylists, photographers and fashion editors alike. The other big fashion film website is Nowness, created in 2010 by LVMH as a space for expression for all luxury conglomerates' brands. These two websites are the basis of the fashion film experimentation and become a space of inspiration since a big part of the short films showcased could be defined as video art.

An additional existing trend, not only in fashion films but also in other forms of postmodern art, is the use of ugliness, understood as disharmony, darkness, bizarreness or even demoniac aesthetics. Although the study of ugliness is not the purpose of this article, a few ideas about it can shed some light on the frequent use of this aesthetic trend. For Kuplen (2013) the use of ugliness and its apparent success when applied to fashion film is not due to consumers' attraction to ugly objects but due to cognitive reasons. Through beauty our mind and our imagination find a smooth way to acquire harmony and balance and in terms of an intellectual "game" it is an easy problem to solve. On the contrary "ugliness generates substantially rich and excessive imagination, which is more difficult for our cognitive abilities to process and to find a resolution for. But it is the search for a resolution which is the manifestation of the principle of purposiveness, the a priori belief that the world is amenable to our cognitive abilities" (Kuplen, 2013: 276). For the author, the ugly object surprises because of its presence, and not only does it captivate our attention but it also paralyses our senses, and keeps the remembrance linked to our memory. In other words we usually keep thinking about something bizarre and ugly with the idea that we can find a kind of harmony in it. And, of course, we can find originality and creativity expressed through ugliness. We can find other explanations of the success of ugliness based on the skeptical postmodern society that in some ways is not confident with the traditional sense of beauty.

This is the case of Ruth Hogben, Nick Knight's assistant in SHOWstudio from 2005 to 2009. She has been working in collaboration with designer Gareth Pugh and created a whole world of inspiration for fashion films frequently inspired by darkness, demons, suffering, death and ugliness but with an aesthetic purpose. She is considered one of the main references in the field, setting a trend mainly represented by British designers like Gareth Pugh or Alexander McQueen.

Many other film makers and photographers have followed Hoghen's works and his work based on transgression is now available in cutting edge magazines and trend

forecasting magazines. Above all the goal is always to surprise and to create disruptive dialogues with the consumer or viewer, around the concepts of elegance, aesthetics, beauty and ugliness.

All in all, the pursuit of beauty and harmony is more common than that of ugliness or darkness. Most fashion films seek to impress their clients and viewers with a sense of balance and delight, even in the case of frequently used thrillers. In these cases, the characters dress in a sophisticated and elegant way evocative of Hollywood movies from the 40's and the 50's. Some excellent examples of this phenomenon are the Prada fashion films *A therapy*, *Muta* or *First Spring, Walking Stories* made for Salvatore Ferragamo or *A rose reborn,* an Ermenegildo Zegna fashion film.

4.5. *The leading role of products in fashion film*

As applies to our research, it is relevant to indicate that dress and accessories played a key role in plot expression of mute film at the beginning of the XX Century. This trait has been reinstated by certain fashion films. For instance, some fashion brands place stylistic product innovation above any other value and regard fashion film as a tool to bring dress closer to a work of art. Such videos present the garments in a leading role in order to transmit abstract concepts. They want to convey the endless creation process of a designer's collection, its anxieties and absences.

Generally, these types of fashion film are a substitute for classic catwalks because their creators consider that filming specific characteristics allow a more effective transmission of the textures, movement and the creative concept of a collection. Whilst they do not ignore persuasion or sales promotion, they consider marketing does not have to be explicit so viewers can enjoy the intense seduction of an aesthetic experience.

Similarly, most luxury and premium brands film the creative process in order to highlight it and present the designer or manufacturer as an artist. Other brands present artisans in leading roles and focus on the product manufacturing process to show the high quality and expertise of its making. In the luxury world, rational argumentation about the convenience of purchasing an object does not stand a chance. Luxury products do not communicate functional, pragmatic features; they convey symbols that refer to abstract notions such as excellence, quality, scarcity, beauty or power. Since luxury brands cannot resort to practical argumentation they must evoke an irrational appeal and seduction of their products. The aim is to attract, to provoke commitment and to create desire and all this is achieved via emotional values (Michaud, 2015).

One of the most paradigmatic examples of this fashion film perspective is the collaboration of the video artist Ruth Hogben with designer Gareth Pugh. This partnership, where Pugh presents his collections in an audiovisual format has been hugely successful, especially in the fashion film *Immagine 79*, where dress plays a leading role, but its beauty is eclipsed by a greater emphasis on its artistic dimension: movement, texture, light and color all blend to create a kinesthetic experience. The viewer can appreciate all the dimensions behind a specific design. Therefore, these fashion films exert a purely aesthetic seduction and prioritize perception instead of content.

Recent trends indicate that increasingly more fashion films place technical and creative innovation above the film plot. This might be due to that fact that contemporary luxury brands, mainstream brands and novel designers are communicating their values using this strategy, which was started by classic luxury brands. Lacking a strong heritage, a well-established name or iconic products, such brands can only distinguish themselves through creativity and technical innovation if they want to be recognized as "new luxury", or so called technoluxury (Michault, 2009).

They frequently maintain a strong heritage and have a series of globally recognized iconic products that have been successfully commercialized for years. Their image is reminiscent of the classic French idea of luxury, based on the quality of the fabrics, the so called "Parisian style", the music played with accordion, sophisticated surroundings, decoration and furniture that reminds Versailles, and emphasizes history as constituent elements in order to acquire a refined lifestyle.

As concerns the aesthetic aspect, Andre D'Avack, president of Chanel fragrances and beauty, recently said that Chanel wanted to add "a supplement of soul" to the message (Copping, 2010). The previously mentioned *L'Odysée* de Cartier film or the series *Secret Garden* by Dior, which takes place in Versailles, both evidence how classic luxury brands upkeep their nobility and splendor in their audiovisual productions, always focused on their iconic products.

Considering the current market saturation of apparently identical products, filming the production process allows product differentiation through quality. Hermés and Loewe have both produced a series of videos, *Les Mains d'Hermés* and *Masters of Leather* which show craftsmen as artists and present their products almost like a work of art, with an exclusive symbolic value. Such brands strive to communicate personalization and taste distinction instead of aspiration.

On the other hand there are fashion brands that lack a historic tradition and media recognition, and for this reason their audiovisual production emphasizes techniques, innovation and the transgression of contemporary art. Technoluxury or the combination of fashion with technology is evident in the contributions of Gareth Pugh or Nicola Formichetti to SHOWstudio. In Hussein Chalayan's audiovisual projects we are closer to an art installation than to a fashion collection. The same feeling may be found in short films made by brands such as Martin Margiela, whose productions such as *Visions Couture* or *Untitled* exalt minimalism and got closer to the purity of forms and redefine luxury as an individual and hedonistic stance. These contemporary brands are not recognized for material excellence or artisan expertise so their films emphasize the concepts underlying fashion collections and the importance of unfinished work.

Modern luxury places itself midway between classic and contemporary luxury identities. It has enough recognition to sustain an aspirational component and at the same time is sufficiently innovative to propose new aesthetic conceptions. Most are relatively young brands, focused on current culture and with core values centered on the concepts of minimalism, simplicity, liberty and power. Within this intermediate positioning, they generally tend to associate themselves with film directors, but their collaboration is centered on assuring coherence between the director's professional style and the brand's identity and not because of the latter's prestige.

In 2012 Prada and Polanski presented the short film *A Therapy*, which reflects the director's identity traits: cynicism, fetishism and psychoanalysis. His leitmotifs blend well with Prada's image based on feminine power and an implicit criticism towards bourgeoisie. As a pioneer in the world of fashion film, Prada has turned towards terror-like contents (*Muta*, *The Woman Dress*), it has adventured into animation (*The Trembled Blossoms*), launched initiatives for novel directors (*Work in Progress*) and has even dared to produce purely expressive films of longer duration and with no explicit plot (*First Spring*).

Proenza Schouler contributes with independent film director Harmony Korine in false documentaries like *Act da Fool* which recreate the aspirations and lifestyle of marginal youngsters. Furthermore, brands such as Burberry or Alexander Wang unite with current youth music and trends. Others such as Raf Simons or Stefano Pilati, combine traditional catwalks with short films that showcase their collections from a different point of view.

These brands, neither extremely innovative nor extremely traditional, choose to screen their production process in a symbolic way. *The Septemberists,* a fashion film by designer

Thom Browne presents a metaphor of the fashion cycle by chronicling the processes of traditions in a small English village during a year.

This modern identity perspective also includes low cost brands with core values based on responding to customers' immediate demands. Their videos praise youth, show latest trends or position themselves regarding social causes. If they approach luxury as is the case of Swedish H&M's collaborations with different companies, they follow a pattern that is similar to classic luxury brands: choosing famous directors and a clearly defined narrative, i.e. the recent film collaboration between Marni and H&M by Sophia Coppola.

5. Conclusions

Coco Chanel says in the fashion film *The return:* "...a woman that has never been loved is lost, in fact as good as dead". We have previously explained that fashion film allows a new strategy for luxury fashion brands from the communication perspective: it opens a way to link brands with the new consumer's desires and behaviors. However, fashion films do not only benefit luxury brands but also the fashion system itself, since it's the first time that an audiovisual format shows the incredible fashion universe to the world, and let the brands express a whole world of human feelings.

New technologies set a new and revolutionary paradigm in terms of knowledge access. But also prepare us for a new relationship with brands since consumers are, more than ever, ready to listen and to collaborate with them. If fashion brands want to take advantage of this new scenario they must comprehend what luxury corporations' strategies, even though they are not using all the interactive possibilities of this new media.

As has been stated, people are open to commit with brands but only if brands speak their own language. Therefore fashion film is a form of experiential marketing and in addition a magnificent tool for brands to communicate with people on the same level.

The use of narrative tools to create experiences and link the consumer with the brand must be explored since there are market hints that show their acceptance. Brand personality was defined as a set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997: 347). In this sense storytelling and serialization are indeed very useful in the sense that they "humanize brands" make easier to engage current and future customers.

We consider that fashion films represent an extraordinary opportunity in terms of brand construction since they enable communications of a wide array of universal values and feelings: love, freedom, honesty, betrayal, loyalty, hatred, revenge, commitment, contradiction, confusion. All the deepest feelings and beliefs of mankind can be expressed in a story and in a brand: they are eager to find good stories to tell and people are craving them.

Although it is true that many fashion films continue showcasing the stereotypes of physical beauty, wealth, exclusivity and elitism, at the same time they are also a new way of expression of deep thoughts and reflections about the human condition, the meaning of beauty and elegance and, of course, an insightful reflection of our times.

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Annex I

Fashion films analyzed in the article *Fashion Films as a new communication format to build fashion brands*

1. Burberry, *15 anniversary of Billy Elliot*, directed by Christopher Bailey (2015)
2. Burberry, *Art of the Trench*, various directors but same script (2008-2015)
3. Cartier, *The proposal*, directed by Sean Ellis (2015)
4. Cartier, *Cartier Diamonds*, directed by Johan Renck (2015)
5. Cartier, *L'Odysée,* directed by Bruno Aveillan (2012)
6. Chanel, *One and Forever*, directed by Karl Lagerfeld (2016)
7. Chanel, *Reincarnation*, directed by Karl Lagerlfeld (2015)
8. Chanel, *The return*, directed by Karl Lagerfeld (2013)
9. Chanel, *Inside Chanel*, 12 chapters and various directors (2012-2015)
10. Chanel, *Bleu de Chanel*, directed by Martin Scorsese (2011)
11. Chanel, *Nº 5 The Film*, directed by Baz Luhrmann (2006)
12. COS, *The sounds of COS,* directed by Lernert & Sander (2014)
13. Dior, *Secret Garden,* directed by Stephen Klein (2015)
14. Dior, *Enter the game,* directed by Marion Cotillard and Elliot Bliss (2014)

15. Dior, *Secret Garden*, directed by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin (2012)
16. Dior, *Lady Grey London,* directed by John Cameron Mitchell (2011)
17. Dior, *L.A. dy Dior*, directed by John Cameron Mitchell (2011)
18. Dior*, Lady Rouge,* directed by Jonas Akerlunds (2010)
19. Dior, *Lady Blue Shangai,* directed by David Lynch (2010)
20. Dior, *Lady Noire Affaire,* directed by Oliver Dahan (2008)
21. Ermenegildo Zegna, *A Rose Reborn*, four Episodes, directed by Park Chan_Wook (2014)
22. Fendi, *Invito Periocoloso*, directed by Karl Lagerfeld (2013)
23. Gareth Pugh *S/S 2016*, directed by Ruth Hogben (2015)
24. Gareth Pugh *A/W 2015*, directed by Ruth Hogben (2015)
25. Gareth Pugh *For MAC S/S 2012*, directed by Ruth Hogben (2011)
26. Gareth Pugh, *Immagine 79* directed by Ruth Hogben (2011)
27. Giorgio Armani, *Valeria*, directed by Olivier Zahm & Julien Carlier (2012)
28. Giorgio Armani, *Alice,* directed by Olivier Zahm & Can Evgin (2011)
29. Gucci, *The Cruise 2016*, directed by Glen Luchford (2016)
30. Gucci, *Gucci Guilty*, directed by Frank Miller (2010)
31. H&M, *Marni at H&M*, directed by Sophia Coppola (2012)
32. Hermès, *Mètamorphose*, directed by Vallèe Duhamel (2014)
33. Hermès, *Man on the move*, directed by Romain Laurent (2014)
34. Hermès, *Delphine, Etablissements Marcel Gandit*, directed by Isabelle Dupuy-Chavanat & Frédéric Laffont (2011)
35. Hermès, *Les Mains d' Hermés* video series (2010-2012)
36. Hussein Chalayan, *Afterwords,* directed by Shannon Starkey (2000)
37. Lanvin, *Fall 2011 Campaign*, directed by Steven Meisel (2011)
38. Loewe, *Colección Oro,* directed by Luis Venegas (2012)
39. Loewe, *Masters of leather*, directed by Matthew Donaldson (2009-2011)
40. Louis Vuitton, *The Spirit of travel,* directed by Gordon von Steiner (2015)
41. Louis Vuitton, *These four walls,* directed by Rankin (2015)
42. Louis Vuitton, *Invitation to travel,* directed by Romain Gavras (2013)
43. Louis Vuitton, *The Exchange,* directed by Rankin (2013)
44. Louis Vuitton, Going with the flow, directed by Damien Lemercier (2013)
45. Louis Vuitton, *Invitation to travel,* directed by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin (2012)
46. Louis Vuitton, *Le Mépris*, directed by Olivier Zham (2012)
47. MAC, *Gareth Pugh for MAC*, directed by Ruth Hogben (2011)
48. Maison Martin Margiela, *Untitled*, directed by Alexander Chernov (2010)
49. Maison Martin Margiela, *Visions Couture*, directed by Nick Knight (2012)
50. Miu Miu, *Les 3 Boutons*, directed by Agnès Varda (2015)
51. Miu Miu, *The Woman dress*, directed by Giada Colagrande (2012)
52. Miu Miu, *Muta*, directed by Lucrecia Martel (2011)
53. Moncler, *Don't steal the jacket*, directed by Bruce Weber (2009)
54. Prada, *A Therapy*, directed by Roman Polanski (2012)
55. Prada, *First spring*, directed by Yang Fudong (2010)
56. Prada, *The trembled Blossoms*, directed by Nick Knight (2008)
57. Prada, *Work in progress*, various directors (2008)
58. Proenza Schouler, *Act da Fool*, directed by Harmony Korine (2011)
59. Thom Browne, *The Septemberists*, directed by Anthony Goicolea (2007)
60. Tod's, *Pashmy Dream*, directed by Dennis Hopper (2008)
61. Vente-Privée, *Desire*, directed by Erwin Olaf (2011)
62. Valentino, *Valentino,* directed by Edoardo Natoli (2015)