Cultivating Desire: Media Technologies in Fashion Branding

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Abstract

This thesis explores the symbiotic relationship between media technologies and fashion branding, examining how the latter is increasingly mediated. In an age where digital platforms dominate, designers have adapted by utilizing a range of media technologies to cultivate desire and construct their perception and identities. The main argument is that media technologies are not just tools for communication but active agents in shaping their brand narratives and consumer perceptions. Whether that be a cult fanbase, reaching a wide consumer audience, or creating anticipation for a certain item, the use of media is often more important than the consumer object itself. Through a qualitative analysis of case studies and examination of contemporary digital strategies, this research investigates the implications of these technologies on fashion branding. The methodology includes content analysis of fashion films, runway shows, and media marketing campaigns. This study contributes to the understanding of fashion branding in the digital age, highlighting the role of media technologies in influencing consumer desire and engagement with fashion brands. It is crucial for comprehending the changing dynamics of fashion promotion and for strategizing future branding initiatives in an increasingly digitized world.
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Introduction: Mediation of Fashion

The notion of desire in fashion is an intricate dance of visibility and mystique, where media presentations and their reception shape the allure of the consumer object as much as the object itself. This thesis, titled "Cultivating Desire: Media Technologies in Fashion Branding," examines the entwined narratives of fashion and the media technologies that broadcast it to the world. In the digital age, the mediation of fashion through its conveyance through various media to the consumer's consciousness, has become a battleground for brand differentiation and identity construction. Media technologies, once peripheral players in the spectacle of fashion, are now central protagonists.

Fashion mediation is more than the dissemination of style and trends or a way of documenting fashion history: it is a complex and ever-changing process that involves creating, framing, and interpreting fashion within the cultural digital consumer sphere. Mediation in this context extends beyond just advertising; it encompasses the entirety of the communication process, from the creation of fashion content to its consumption. This process is increasingly dominated by digital technologies, which not only deliver content but also shape the narrative and context in which fashion is consumed. In parallel, just as the visual arts leverage diverse media forms to convey aesthetic and cultural narratives, fashion branding similarly engages with a multidisciplinary canvas. From photography and videography to interactive installations and virtual reality, the methods of fashion presentation echo the rich tapestry of visual arts practices. These connective points between fashion and other visual arts not only broaden the repertoire of fashion communication but also enrich the interpretive experiences of the media audience. The interplay of color, light, and form, the dialogue between the spectator and space, and the
emotional power of visual storytelling, all hallmarks of the visual arts, are now integral to fashion branding, creating a shared journey in the evolution of media technologies and consumer engagement.

The digital transformation has begun an era where brands are being compelled to reevaluate their branding strategies. With a constant overconsumption of media being pushed onto consumers, the relationship between fan and cult brand is a far more intimate one. Grand logos embossed as the centerpiece of a consumer object are no longer necessary to create a sense of identity and recognition\(^1\): pieces are identifiable by the loyal fans before they ever hit the shelves because of the mediation of the fashion cycle. Media technologies, once tools for straightforward marketing, have morphed into instruments of engagement and narrative creation. They enable brands to curate their identities and foster connections with consumers that transcend the physical product. The Barthesian idea of luxury semiotics speaks to the signification of identity and group belonging through the ownership of consumer objects, exemplified by the socio-visual semiotics of social media\(^2\). This dynamic has made media technologies pivotal in the contemporary branding of fashion, allowing for the creation of immersive experiences that resonate on an emotional level with the consumer.

Incorporating the perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu and Thorstein Veblen into the discussion on media technologies in fashion branding further enriches our understanding of how brands cultivate desire and engagement. Bourdieu’s concept of "cultural capital\(^3\)" can be


intertwined with the digital transformation in fashion, where the accumulation and display of knowledge or engagement with certain brands serve as a social marker, distinguishing the elite from the masses. The strategic use of media by fashion brands can thus be seen as a means for consumers to accumulate cultural capital, by aligning themselves with brands that signify a certain status or taste level. This is not merely about the physical possession of fashion items, but the symbolic value and social currency gained through their mediated presence in digital platforms.

Similarly, Thorstein Veblen’s theory of "conspicuous consumption" is pivotal in understanding the role of media in fashion branding. In a digital age where visibility is heightened, the consumption of luxury fashion is not just about the utility of the item but its display to an audience, serving as an indicator of wealth and social standing. Media technologies amplify this effect, enabling brands to craft narratives that appeal to the desires for exclusivity and distinction. The spectacle of fashion, facilitated by digital media, feeds into the Veblenian notion of leisure class behaviors, where the act of consumption is performed for the gaze of others, mediated through social media platforms and digital marketing campaigns.

The intimacy between fan and cult brand, as highlighted earlier, can also be examined through the lens of Bourdieu and Veblen, as this relationship is emblematic of a shift towards the symbolic aspects of consumption where the social signals sent by brand affiliation are as important as the products themselves. This shift underlines a transition from conspicuous consumption to conspicuous affiliation, where identity and group belonging are signified through

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mediated brand interactions rather than the mere possession of luxury goods. The role of media technologies in this context is to provide the platforms and narratives that facilitate the construction of these social identities, making the medium an essential part of the message in the contemporary landscape of fashion branding. Thus, through the integration of Bourdieu’s and Veblen’s theories, we see how media technologies in fashion branding are not just about marketing or aesthetics but are deeply entwined with the social fabric, influencing and reflecting societal norms, desires, and hierarchies.

At the heart of this thesis lies the assertion that the strategic use of media technologies is instrumental in fashion branding today, proving more important than the garments themselves. Brands are no longer solely producers of apparel but are architects of desire, using media as their blueprint. The thesis statement, therefore, is that media technologies, through their role in fashion mediation, actively shape consumer perceptions and desires, which in turn informs the success and identity of fashion brands. This is not a passive process, rather one where every choice of medium, platform, and technology is a deliberate stroke in the crafting of a brand's image and its connection with the audience.

This research unfolds across three chapters, each examining a distinct facet of fashion's digital metamorphosis. Chapter One explores fashion films and runway shows, vehicles for storytelling that bind the visual to the narrative. Chapter Two investigates the digital resources and marketing innovations that transform brand outreach into consumer engagement. Chapter Three analyzes media representations of brands and the role of celebrity and spectacle in the creation of brand mythology.

The methodology adopted in this thesis is qualitative, involving the analysis of visual and textual media to decode the semiotics and strategies at play. By integrating theory with case
studies of brands like Enfants Riches Déprimés, Maison Margiela, and Gucci, this thesis offers a lens through which to view the evolving nature of fashion branding where media technologies are not mere canvases but active agents in the art of desire cultivation.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader discourse on the convergence of media, technology, and consumer ideology. It addresses a noticeable gap in existing scholarship on media ideology by linking the tactics of fashion branding with the media studies’ theoretical frameworks, providing fresh insights into the mechanisms of desire within the fashion industry. By examining the strategic use of media technologies in fashion branding, this thesis offers a comprehensive look at fashion’s adaptation to the digital age and the implications for future branding strategies. It is a narrative of adaptation, innovation, and the relentless pursuit of consumer engagement in a world where the medium is a quintessential part of the fashion message.
Chapter One: The Art and Influence of Fashion Films in Brand Storytelling

In the fabric of modern fashion branding, the thread that has increasingly become pivotal is the art of the fashion film. This multimedia form transcends traditional advertising, evolving into a nuanced storytelling medium that brands leverage to narrate their identity, philosophy, and the stories behind their collections. Fashion films are not just promotional tools but rich, creative expressions that play a significant role in the landscape of brand storytelling.

Fashion films emerge as a distinct genre that blends elements of film, fashion, and performance art into a cohesive narrative experience\(^6\). Narratives allow brands to infuse their garments with deep cultural, emotional, or intellectual themes, elevating fashion items to narrative heroes in their own right. They have evolved from simple runway recordings to cinematic expressions that incorporate storytelling, aesthetics, and emotion. These short films, often featuring avant-garde cinematography and compelling narratives, allow brands to communicate more than just the details of their clothing: they convey the mood, inspiration, and artistic vision behind a collection. The inherent versatility of the fashion film, not constrained by advanced plots or studio limitations, enables brands to experiment with various narrative styles, from abstract, conceptual pieces to linear, story-driven content. The self-produced nature of the fashion film that exists outside of the Hollywood studio system allows them to create in the same

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manner as the European art house films of the 20th century\textsuperscript{7}, outside of the pressure of studio executives and box office goals. While many fashion films are self-funded to maintain creative integrity, such as Gucci's eclectic and narrative-driven campaigns, others harness the cinematic prowess of film industry collaborations, as seen with Prada's enlistment of Wes Anderson. This partnership brought to life \textit{Castello Cavalcanti}\textsuperscript{8}, merging Prada's sleek aesthetic with Anderson's distinctive storytelling and visual style, showcasing the brand's narratives in a richly textured cinematic context. Being able to focus on a strong artistic output that critically engages fans, while also presenting the clothing, is what makes fashion film uniquely strong, and this flexibility allows brands to align their films with their unique identity. Fashion films have the power to immerse viewers in the brand's universe, offering an emotional and sensory experience that deepens the viewer's connection to the brand.

Fashion films serve a strategic function in the broader context of brand storytelling. They are a medium through which brands can engage with their audience on an emotional level, transcending the traditional consumer-brand relationship. Through these films, brands can articulate their vision, values, and the narrative arc of their collections in a way that resonates with viewers' aspirations and ideals. Their narrative depth of fashion films facilitates a dialogue between brands and their audiences, allowing for a more nuanced expression of identity and ethos. These films can address themes that matter to both the brand and its audience, such as sustainability, craftsmanship, diversity, and innovation, fostering a sense of shared values and community.

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\textsuperscript{8} Anderson, Wes, director. \textit{Castello Cavalcanti}. 2013, Prada.
In an oversaturated market, differentiation is key to capturing and retaining consumer attention. Fashion films offer brands a unique avenue for differentiation, enabling them to stand out through original content that reflects their identity and values. The artistic and emotional depth of these films can leave a lasting impression on viewers, distinguishing the brand in a crowded marketplace. More so, fashion films are pivotal in driving consumer engagement. They can be shared across various digital platforms, reaching audiences worldwide and inviting interaction through comments, shares, and likes. This global reach and interactive nature make fashion films an effective tool for building brand awareness and fostering community among consumers. The continued evolution of digital technologies and platforms will offer new opportunities for creative expression and audience engagement.

Among the scores of fashion creatives leveraging the unique medium of fashion films, Enfants Riches Déprimés stands out for its unabashed embrace of exclusivity, subculture, and intentionally unsettling aesthetics. The brand, founded by Henri Alexander Levy\(^9\), is notable not just for its runways but for how it intertwines its narrative and visual storytelling with the ethos of neo-punk and luxury. A prime example of this approach is the fashion film *Desolate Then*\(^10\), which encapsulates the essence of Enfants Riches Déprimés' identity and its deliberate strategy of isolation and exclusivity.


Desolate Then is stars a 76-year-old actress and Warhol superstar Mary Woronov, best known for her work in cult art film like Eating Raoul\(^{11}\) and Death Race 2000\(^{12}\), and lo-fi artist Ariel Pink. The film is a journey through a series of unconventional settings: a funeral parlor, a dentist's office, culminating in an unsettling dinner scene reminiscent of The Last Supper\(^{13}\). This choice of locations, combined with the thematic elements of excessive leather, religious iconography, romanticism, and the intimate portrayal of teeth and private drawings, creates a narrative deeply intertwined with the Spring Summer 21 collection it showcases. The clothing, while central, acts more as a character within the story than its focal point, merging seamlessly with the film's dark, edgy aesthetic.

Shot entirely on location and featured alongside Levy's abstract paintings at its premiere, Desolate Then offers a glimpse into the complex world of Enfants Riches Déprimés. The film's use of intricately branded objects, such as dental tools, as diegetic props, invites viewers into a meticulously crafted universe that transcends traditional fashion presentation. The decision to release the film exclusively on VHS is a testament to the brand's commitment to exclusivity and its nostalgic yet isolating ethos. This medium, obsolete for the mainstream, requires fans to engage in "fan labor\(^{14}\)"—seeking out a VHS player and purchasing the tape—further cementing the film's role as a cult artifact rather than a widely accessible piece of marketing.

\(^{11}\) Bartel, Paul, director. Eating Raoul. 20th Century-Fox Film Corp., 1982.


This decision not only reinforces Enfants Riches Déprimés’ image as an exclusive brand but also imposes a unique form of fan labor that is inherently isolating, yet intimately personal. In an era where digital media reigns supreme, the requirement to locate and operate a VHS player becomes a deliberate barrier to entry, a gatekeeping mechanism that distinguishes the devoted followers from casual observers. This physical effort, coupled with the search for the now-antiquated technology, does more than just filter the audience; it creates a solitary journey of dedication. Fans are thus transformed into cultural archaeologists, actively participating in a form of analog resistance to modern consumption patterns. The VHS release is also emblematic of the brand's alignment with the material culture of physical media. This strategy goes beyond mere nostalgia, it speaks to a fetishization of physical formats that is mirrored in the tangible textures and rebellious spirit of the brand's clothing. The deliberate use of a practically obsolete medium like VHS taps into a subcultural vein that venerates the physicality and imperfections of analog media. This choice resonates with those who find value in the tactile, the collectible, and the ritualistic act of engaging with material objects, drawing parallels to the way fashion enthusiasts appreciate the craftsmanship of a luxury garment. More so, the material cultural connections between the medium of the fashion film and the physical media it employs are rich and multifaceted. Just as the feel of fabric against skin or the weight of a well-crafted piece of clothing carries meaning, so does the act of inserting a VHS tape into a player. It creates a sensory connection to the brand that deepens the consumer's relationship with it, imbuing the experience with a sense of authenticity and exclusivity. This pursuit of the VHS, an almost inaccessible relic by today's standards, becomes part of the brand's mystique, weaving the act of viewing the film into a ritualistic experience that solidifies the fan's place within the brand's inner circle. Such isolating fan labor underscores the film’s status as an esoteric talisman, elevating it
from mere fashion marketing to a symbol of ideological and aesthetic allegiance to Enfants Riches Déprimés’ world.

The choice of VHS as the sole distribution channel for *Desolate Then* aligns with Levy's philosophy that "Enfants Riches Déprimés is not for you." This statement, far from alienating potential customers, serves to heighten the allure of the brand, creating a sense of desirability among those who resonate with its edgy, neo-punk graphics and the exclusive nature of its offerings. Despite, or perhaps because of, its abrasive attitude and the exorbitant prices of its garments, Enfants Riches Déprimés manages to sell out collections within minutes of their release.

The artificial exclusivity demonstrated through the rollout of *Desolate Then* is quintessential to understanding Enfants Riches Déprimés' brand identity. It cultivates a subculture among its fans, an in-group that prides itself on being part of a select few who can access and appreciate the brand's unique offerings. This strategy of fan isolation not only enhances the brand's mystique but also fosters a strong, dedicated community of followers who are willing to go to great lengths to partake in its world.

Enfants Riches Déprimés' use of fashion film is a powerful illustration of how fashion branding can extend beyond clothing to encapsulate a broader narrative and identity. Through its deliberate embrace of exclusivity, subculture, and avant-garde aesthetics, the brand has crafted a unique position within the fashion industry, one that challenges conventional notions of accessibility and consumerism. *Desolate Then* serves as a compelling case study in the power of

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fashion films to convey a brand's ethos, engage with its audience on a deep level, and create a lasting impact that transcends the physicality of clothing.

Following the avant-garde and deliberately exclusive approach of Enfants Riches Déprimés, Maison Margiela takes a distinct yet equally impactful path in the realm of fashion films and brand storytelling. Under the creative direction of John Galliano\textsuperscript{16}, Margiela's 2022 Artisanal Couture show\textsuperscript{17} transcended conventional fashion presentation parameters, morphing into a performance art piece that was digitally presented as a fashion film. This innovative approach to the runway show not only showcased the collection but also offered a deep, narrative-driven experience that spoke volumes about the brand's artistic vision and the power of media in fashion as a medium for storytelling.

Maison Margiela's Artisanal 2022 collection was unveiled through a staged one-act live theater performance in Paris, a profound exploration of themes such as pain, grief, and the struggle against oppressive forces. The live performance, featuring models embodying characters within a play, served as a vivid tableau vivant of Galliano's introspection and commentary on patriarchal power and personal anguish. This narrative depth was intricately woven into the fabric of the collection itself, with each garment representing historical influences, emotional resonances, and a critique of societal norms. The setting, a theater space at Paris' Palais de Chaillot\textsuperscript{18}, became a live studio where the magic of a motion picture was conjured before the audience's eyes. This meta-theatrical setup, revealing the artifice and craft behind cinematic production, paralleled the fashion film's creation. Models, doubling as actors, navigated through

\textsuperscript{16} "Maison Margiela Artisanal 2022 Collection." \textit{YouTube}, YouTube, 6 July 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI068htM.

\textsuperscript{17} "Maison Margiela Artisanal 2022 Collection." \textit{YouTube}, YouTube, 6 July 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI068htM.

a dreamlike narrative, engaging in a story of star-crossed lovers entangled in a web of familial violence and societal constraints.

The collection commences with an evocative monologue-turned-dialogue, delivered with a twang reminiscent of the Old West. A woman's voice recounts a harrowing defense against an assailant, armed only with the jagged edge of a broken beer bottle. This scene sets the stage for the entrance of five models, their attire a confluence of punk spirit and cowboy aesthetics, standing in unison as embers and flames dance on the screens behind them. The fiery backdrop, which morphs into a blood-red inferno, becomes a visual echo of the story's dramatic tension. The runway is transformed into a space where narratives of resistance and resilience are woven into the presentation. This opening act concludes with the disquieting sound of a dispute that escalates to a chilling climax: the thunderous punctuation of gunshots, implying the assassination of unseen characters who joined the debate on her right to defend herself, amplifying the intensity of the unfolding narrative. It is within this heated, contentious atmosphere that the Artisanal runway presentation takes its first steps, setting in motion a series of performances that delve into the symbiotic relationship between attire, identity, and narrative.

In a striking demonstration of meta-performance, the presentation juxtaposed the real with the surreal, inviting the audience to question the fabric of reality itself. As models, adorned in couture uniforms that archetypically challenged the notions of the cowboy and bellhop, faux-sang into a silent microphone, they engaged in a performance that was devoid of sound yet rich in narrative. This silent serenade, a play within a play, was underscored by a soundtrack that offered no echo of their mime, an intentional dissonance that emphasized the spectacle of the act over its auditory void. Meanwhile, the entire sequence was captured and re-captured by live videographers, their presence only a whisper away from the performers, projecting and re-
projecting the scenes onto the show's screens. This layering of performance, recording, and projection underscored a recursive visual experience akin to a film cutting rapidly between scenes. Later, the audience's senses were commandeered by a staged gunfight, as models engaged in a mock battle that dominated the soundscape. As they crudely mouthed along to the scripted lines, the constructed nature of the narrative was laid bare, reminding the audience of the artifice within which they were complicit. This cacophony of silent songs and visible yet unheard gunfights painted a vivid scene of discordance, weaving a rich tapestry of thematic elements that spoke to the struggle against unseen and unheard oppressive forces.

The innovative power-cut technique used in the show introduced a new vocabulary in haute couture, merging the authoritarian aesthetics of uniforms with the vulnerability of slashed fabrics, each tear a testament to the memory of aggression. Traditional haute couture silhouettes were reimagined through the prism of surgical scrubs, blending the elegance of high fashion with the raw, utilitarian symbolism of medical attire. The fashion film, capturing this live action performance from various angles and intertwining it with digital editing, transcended traditional runway presentations. It offered a multidimensional experience that was both immersive and reflective, inviting viewers to engage with the garments on a deeply personal level. Through this digital medium, Galliano extended an invitation to viewers to partake in a live theatre performance with themselves, engaging with the garments as catalysts for personal reflection and emotional resonance.

This film represented a paradigm shift post-pandemic in how fashion can be experienced and interpreted. It merges the tactile beauty of haute couture with the emotional depth of theatrical performance, creating a narrative-rich environment where clothes are not just worn but
felt and lived. The fashion film serves as a testament to Galliano's genius, offering a glimpse into the future of fashion presentations where storytelling, artistry, and digital innovation converge.

In juxtaposition with the isolated yet cult-like engagement of Enfants Riches Déprimés, Margiela's approach underscores the breadth and diversity of fashion films as a medium. While both brands leverage the power of narrative and exclusivity, Margiela's use of performance art and digital cinema opens up new avenues for emotional engagement and artistic expression within the fashion industry. This evolution from the subcultural to the theatrical illustrates the endless possibilities of fashion films in crafting immersive, meaningful, and enduring brand stories.

Building on the narrative depth and emotional engagement demonstrated in the fashion films of Enfants Riches Déprimés and Maison Margiela, Ann Demeulemeester's Fall/Winter 2021-2022 presentation marks a synthesis of fashion film and runway, crafting a narrative-driven experience that transcends traditional boundaries of fashion showcases. In this innovative filmic presentation, the runway is reimagined as an immersive world, where models, akin to actors, traverse through an intricately designed setting that serves both as a stage and a narrative backdrop. This hybrid form blurs the lines between a fashion show and cinematic storytelling, offering viewers an engaging journey through the thematic essence and aesthetic vision of the collection.

The video presentation masterfully employs chiaroscuro lighting, drawing on the dramatic interplay of light and shadow to highlight the mood and textures of the collection. This stylistic choice not only accentuates the garments but also creates a vivid, emotive landscape that

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envelops the audience. Scenes such as an actress enveloped in a voluminous black fur coat and hat, rocking in solitude within the stark, stone confines of an empty room, evoke a profound sense of introspection and melancholy. These moments, steeped in narrative depth, allow the audience to connect with the collection on a visceral level, beyond the mere visual appeal of the garments. The journey culminates in an abandoned mansion, a setting that becomes a character in its own right within the film. The mansion, with its aura of decay and grandeur, serves as the perfect terminus for the runway-walk-turned-narrative-expedition. Unlike traditional runways where the focus remains squarely on the clothing, just as the traditional runway presentation of this collection did, this presentation lavishes attention on mise-en-scène, inviting the audience to explore the environment’s textures, shadows, and architectural decay. This attention to background detail enriches the viewing experience, providing a context that enhances the emotional and aesthetic resonance of the collection.

Ann Demeulemeester's approach echoes the artistic and narrative ambitions seen in the works of Enfants Riches Déprimés and Maison Margiela yet forges its own path through its unique integration of runway and film. While Enfants Riches Déprimés delves into exclusivity and subcultural ethos through its fashion films, and Margiela explores theatricality and emotional depth, Demeulemeester invites the audience into a poetic narrative space where the runway becomes a cinematic journey. This method not only showcases the collection but also immerses the viewer in a mood, a story, and a world crafted by the designer.

Ann Demeulemeester's foray into the realm of fashion films with the Fall/Winter 2021-2022 presentation represented a narrative-rich approach, one that synergized the runway with cinematic depth. This was a distinctive leap from the confines of traditional showcases into an artful unification of narrative and aesthetic immersion. In recent years, however, the brand has
had a noticeable pivot back towards more conventional video presentations of runway shows—executed with the brand's characteristic finesse and attention to the poetic ambiance. Yet, this is not to say that the brand has eschewed innovation; rather, it has recalibrated its creative output to align with the short-form content boom, optimizing its vision for the new media age of Reels and TikTok.

The 2024 series "Kids\textsuperscript{20}" is emblematic of this shift. Composed of 20-second vignettes, each segment spotlights a model, a character in their own right, encapsulating their essence in a fleeting yet impactful burst of visual storytelling. This approach is tailored to the quick consumption habits of modern audiences, capturing attention spans whittled down by the rapid scroll of social media feeds. Through this lens, Ann Demeulemeester's content becomes a series of poetic whispers, each echoing the brand's ethos in a format that resonates with the digital zeitgeist. It is a strategic embrace of the way narrative is consumed in fragments, with each vignette serving as a puzzle piece of the broader brand narrative: concise, yet rich with intent and style.

In conclusion, Ann Demeulemeester's evolving strategy reflects a broader trend within the fashion industry: the marriage of brand storytelling with the instantaneous, fragmented nature of digital media consumption. The brand's fashion films have transitioned from immersive worlds to distilled moments, each micro-narrative tailored to leave a quick yet indelible impression. This demonstrates a keen understanding of contemporary media dynamics and a willingness to continually redefine the means of audience engagement. By weaving its narratives

into the fabric of short-form content, Ann Demeulemeester maintains its narrative artistry while meeting its audience where they are: in the swift, flickering glow of their screens.
Chapter Two: Digital Resources and Brand Marketing

The rise of social media has revolutionized the way that luxury brands interact with their consumers. Instagram’s visually driven platform has become the cornerstone for fashion branding. Its digital space isn’t just one for branding, but for storytelling, where brands can curate an aesthetic and narrative that speaks to their identity. Instagram’s stories, posts, lives, and reels provide a dynamic way to present runway shows, behind-the-scenes content, and celebrity endorsements, creating a diversity of engagement that is more authentic and aspirational than a runway alone.

Beyond social media, fashion brands are increasingly investing in proprietary websites and applications to enhance the consumer experience. The created digital venues serve as a holistic representation of the brand: a controlled environment for storytelling and commerce. Brand apps often push the boundaries of traditional online commerce with features like live streaming of runway shows, in-app exclusive releases, and loyalty programs. These platforms become an extension of the brand's identity, offering a more immersive and personalized experience.

Vogue Runway, an essential component of the digital resources that fashion brands use to engage with consumers, operates as a digital platform for the display and dissemination of high fashion. It functions as a tool for fashion democratization, granting the wider public access to collections that were historically exclusive to a select group of fashion insiders. The platform allows users from around the world to view runways as they happen, creating a sense of inclusion and expanding the reach of high fashion. It invites users into a world that was once
behind closed doors, a front-row seat to the runway experience from the comfort of their homes or mobile devices.

While Vogue Runway democratically opens up the catwalks to public viewing, the representation of these shows is restricted by the medium itself. Instead of a dynamic, sensory experience that a live runway show presents, consumers receive a selective portrayal: what Vogue’s photographers capture and what its editors choose to highlight. The runway is distilled to a series of static images, and the narrative of the show is often summarized in a brief review accompanying these photos. This curated selection shapes the viewer's perception, potentially overshadowing the designer's intended message or the intricate details of the garments.

Drawing upon Matthew Guschwan's exploration of participatory culture in "Fandom, Brandom, and the Limits of Participatory Culture," Vogue Runway can be examined as a case study in the push and pull between consumer engagement and controlled brand messaging. Guschwan's piece delves into the ways in which fans and brands interact, suggesting that while there are opportunities for consumers to engage with and even influence brands, there are also significant limitations imposed by the brands themselves. Similarly, Vogue Runway provides a platform for engagement by allowing users to view, share, and comment on collections. Yet, it does so within the confines of a pre-determined narrative controlled by Vogue, thereby limiting the viewer’s agency in interpreting the collections independently.

The reduction of the runway to a digital format also brings to mind Nancy Troy's analysis in Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion, where fashion is contextualized within the broader constructs of art and culture. Troy’s study explains how fashion interacts with

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and is influenced by modern art movements, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between the two. Vogue Runway, therefore, not only presents fashion collections but also frames them within a certain cultural and artistic narrative. This framing can either elevate the perceived value of a collection by associating it with artistic movements or conversely, by adhering to a particular narrative, could potentially marginalize more avant-garde expressions that don't fit within that narrative.

Troy’s analysis dives into the expansion strategies of luxury brands, particularly their foray into the realms of perfume and makeup. This extension into more accessible product lines serves as an insightful parallel to luxury brands' current move into the social digital consumer space. Just as perfume and makeup offer a more accessible entry point into the world of luxury for those who may be barred by the high price point of haute couture\(^{23}\), digital engagement represents a similar strategy in the modern landscape.

Through social media, online fashion shows, and other digital experiences, luxury brands are now creating virtual products of their brand essence: essentially digital “perfumes” that distill their identity into a form that can be experienced by a wider audience. These platforms become accessible touchpoints, where the name value of the brand is leveraged to engage consumers who crave the luxury experience but may not have the means to purchase high-end fashion items. This leads to a democratization of luxury by allowing consumers to interact with and even co-create the brand narrative, much like how a signature scent can evoke the essence of a brand without the need to invest in a full wardrobe.

This strategy recognizes that the value of luxury brands extends beyond their physical products, it is also found in the prestige of the brand and the aspirational lifestyle it represents.

Digital platforms, therefore serve as a new arm of accessibility and engagement. They are not mere marketing tools but an extension of the brand's universe, where consumers who find value in the brand’s ethos can engage with its identity, partake in its culture, and become brand ambassadors, regardless of their purchasing power.

The digital landscape, like the market for perfumes and makeup, presents a ground for luxury brands to expand their reach. It allows them to cast a wider net, capturing the hearts and minds of potential consumers through immersive experiences and interactive storytelling. Here, engagement is the new luxury, and participation becomes a coveted commodity. The digital engagement strategy thus mirrors the logic of diversification into perfumes and makeup: it's about distilling the brand's essence into a more universally consumable form.

The advent of diffusion lines represents a strategic evolution in fashion branding, embodying an accessible gateway for wider audience participation. In line with the essence of luxury brands like Fear of God and its diffusion line ESSENTIALS, Comme des Garçons with Comme des Garçons PLAY, and A Bathing Ape alongside AAPE, these subsidiary collections offer a distilled version of the brand's identity, imbued with a heavier emphasis on logos that often sell more volume than their mainline counterparts. This branding strategy not only caters to a consumer base seeking affordability without forgoing the cachet of luxury names but also encourages sharing and engagement on social media platforms. Such diffusion lines serve as a badge of in-group membership, as consumers not only wear the brand but also amplify its reach by becoming inadvertent brand ambassadors through their posts. By aligning with the digital zeitgeist where visibility equates to currency, these lines effectively harness the virality of social media, making brand interaction and visibility more pervasive. This parallels the rationale behind extending luxury brands into the realms of perfumes and makeup, where the brand ethos is
transmuted into forms more universally appealing and consumable, thereby broadening the
brand's allure and fostering a community of engaged, aspirational consumers.

This participation dynamic points to a nuanced role for media technologies like Vogue
Runway in the construction of fashion branding. The platform serves as a powerful mediator that
can simultaneously broaden brand exposure and restrict brand narratives. For fashion brands, the
representation on Vogue Runway can be a double-edged sword: it is a necessary engagement for
visibility and relevance, yet it may also narrow the brand’s narrative control and the multifaceted
storytelling potential of a collection. Vogue Runway's standardized presentation format, with its
high-quality, uniform imagery and structured layout\(^2\), imposes certain constraints on how a
brand's narrative is communicated. It prioritizes visual consistency over the unique ambiance that
brands may cultivate in their original shows, potentially diminishing the impact of the thematic
elements and storytelling that a live presentation offers. The only subversion of this uniformity
comes in detail shots of individual looks, but even that has become standard. Additionally, the
platform's editorial voice and curation can further influence the perception of a collection,
underscoring select aspects while potentially overlooking others, which can result in a
homogenized brand narrative that aligns with Vogue Runway's aesthetic and narrative
preferences rather than the brand's intended messaging.

The strategic use of media technologies is, therefore, critical in the branding of fashion in
the digital age, as highlighted by the pivotal role of Vogue Runway. It illustrates how brands
must not only create compelling collections but also consider how these collections are mediated
through platforms that significantly shape consumer perceptions. In the quest to cultivate desire,
brands must navigate these digital landscapes, crafting their identities not only through their

garments but also through their representation in the media. Vogue Runway, as a case study, underscores the importance of understanding the implications of digital mediation for future branding strategies, signifying a narrative of adaptation and innovation in the relentless pursuit of consumer engagement in a world where the medium indeed becomes an intrinsic part of the fashion message.

The digital era has seen a significant integration of fashion with technology, particularly through augmented reality and virtual reality, to create virtual try-on experiences. This allows consumers to visualize how products would look on them without the need for a physical fitting. Brands are also utilizing 3D visualizations\(^{25}\) to show their garments on various body types and in different environments, enhancing the online shopping experience and reducing the need for in-person interactions.

Beyond the individualized fit and visualization offered by AR and VR, the broader concept of virtual shopping has revolutionized the consumer experience within fashion retail. Interactive digital storefronts and virtual showrooms have emerged, allowing consumers to navigate through an immersive shopping environment from the comfort of their own devices. These platforms replicate the spatial and visual aspects of a physical store, including the tactile sensations through haptic feedback technologies. Users can browse through virtual aisles, interact with products through 3D modeling, and even engage with AI sales assistants for recommendations and styling tips. Virtual shopping events and fashion shows have further blurred the lines between reality and virtuality, providing a socially rich and engaging platform that mirrors the physical world's excitement and exclusivity. This digital shift isn’t only transforming how consumers engage with fashion brands but also revolutionizing inventory

management and reducing overhead costs for retailers. The environmental footprint of fashion is also addressed as this digital transition allows for a reduction in waste associated with the production and transportation of physical samples. While virtual shopping technologies offer a promise of sustainability, concerns about their environmental impact are indeed relevant. The increased demand on servers to power AI applications, the lifecycle and disposal of electronic devices, and the carbon footprint associated with the energy consumption of these technologies contribute to their environmental cost. Therefore, as the fashion industry embraces these digital innovations, it must also consider and address the ecological implications of e-waste and the energy intensity of maintaining virtual platforms. As the technology advances, virtual shopping is poised to become an increasingly integral aspect of fashion retail, democratizing luxury experiences and making them more accessible to a global audience.

Gucci’s most notable digital initiative, the Gucci Garden\(^{26}\), exemplifies the brand's innovative approach to integrating storytelling with consumer interaction through media. Originally a physical location in Florence\(^{27}\), the Gucci Garden was reimagined as a virtual experience that transcended geographical boundaries, allowing global access to the brand’s heritage and ethos. This virtual space is a meticulously crafted world where each room unveils a chapter of the brand's story, engaging visitors in a narrative that blends history with contemporary design. In this virtual world, users can interact with art installations that reference past collections, iconic brand motifs, and Gucci’s fashion philosophy. This interaction is not passive, it's designed to be an exploratory journey that mirrors the experience of gaming, making it an appealing and memorable form of brand engagement. The Gucci Garden Store serves as the


physical manifestation of this concept, offering a curated selection of products that align with the themes and aesthetics experienced virtually. Gucci Garden’s biggest strength lies in its approach to creating a brand universe that can be accessed anywhere, anytime, democratizing the luxury experience without sullying the rare luxury of owning a garment. The virtual “garden” acts like a digital prototype, a testing ground for new concepts that can later be applied in real life. This strategy is not just about selling products, rather it's about reinforcing Gucci's position as an innovator and a storyteller in the luxury fashion space.

Another luxury brand’s foray into the digital connection sphere to harness a larger cult following outside of their physical product is Balenciaga's collaboration with Fortnite²⁸. This was a pioneering example of how fashion brands are venturing into the digital entertainment space. By introducing a line of virtual clothing within the game, Balenciaga has acknowledged the importance of the gaming community as a significant part of their audience. This partnership showcases the brand’s willingness to embrace digital culture and connect with consumers in their own environments, further emphasizes the “front-of-the-trend” youth aesthetic that they are curating with creative director Demna Gvasalia. The collaboration extends beyond mere product placement: it is an immersive brand experience. Players can dress their avatars in Balenciaga outfits, integrating the brand into the narrative of their gameplay and identity within the virtual world. This creates a unique form of engagement, as players not only see and select Balenciaga designs but also live them within the game's universe. It represents a shift in marketing strategy, where the product is woven into the fabric of digital experiences, making the brand an intrinsic part of the consumer's online life.

This collaboration is also indicative of the evolving landscape of fashion consumption. The digital garments have no physical counterpart, yet they hold value within the gaming community, demonstrating how digital assets can acquire significance in virtual economies. It opens up a dialogue about the nature of ownership and the value assigned to non-tangible goods. Balenciaga’s venture into Fortnite is a bold statement on the future of fashion, where the digital self is as significant as the physical self, and brand interactions can occur in any realm. The collaboration reflects a keen understanding of the importance of cross-platform visibility. By aligning with Fortnite, a game with millions of active players and a cultural status symbol of the era in itself, Balenciaga ensures visibility far beyond traditional fashion consumers. This not only broadens the brand’s reach but also positions it at the intersection of fashion, technology, and entertainment, where it can engage with a diverse, global, and digitally native audience.

Snapchat's integration of designer fashion into its Bitmoji feature represents a unique blend of personal expression and brand interaction where users can interact and flaunt their affiliation for a brand on a site they already use. While Gucci Garden was about an intrinsic connection with a brand and Balenciaga Fortnite blended the two, Snapchat Avatar dressing in designer clothes is the pinnacle of status signaling through clothes. Users can dress their digital avatars with clothing from top fashion designers and even specific collaborations. These include Valentino, Calvin Klein, Off White, and Ralph Lauren among the most notable luxury houses, but even event-specific collaborations like Nike x Sabrina Ionescu have made an appearance, further emphasizing the ultra-fast consumption and trend cycle. Bitmoji fashion is merging the

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virtual and real-world fashion landscapes. The platform offers a democratized vision of high fashion, making it accessible to all users regardless of their physical location or economic status. This accessibility is crucial in an era where brand experience and personal identity are increasingly defined in digital spaces. Snapchat’s approach allows users to connect with fashion brands in a way that feels personal and self-expressive, fostering a sense of ownership and affinity with the brand.

From a marketing perspective, Snapchat's avatar designer clothes extend the reach of fashion brands into the daily communication and social interactions of users. Each time a user sends a snap with their Bitmoji dressed in a designer outfit, the brand gains visibility through participation in their fandom. This not only serves as a form of organic advertisement but also embeds the brand into the social fabric of the digital age. The implications of such digital representations are profound, challenging traditional conceptions of what it means to wear a brand, suggesting that digital expressions of style can be as influential as physical attire. Moreover, this feature reflects an understanding of the importance of personal branding in the social media era, where users are curators of their own digital personas and can pledge loyalty to the brands that they connect with.

The concept of fandom has traditionally been associated with popular or “low” culture, encompassing the hyper-focused communities that emerge around sports teams, fictional writing, narrative media, and celebrities. However, the stratification of culture into high and low is an increasingly outdated paradigm, especially as luxury fashion becomes more culturally central within the digital landscape. The democratization of fashion through platforms like Vogue Runway allows for the logic of fandom to enter the luxury fashion industry, therefore inviting a re-evaluation of fandom as a significant undertheorized area within this sector.
In a world where high fashion is no longer on the fringes of cultural consumption but is instead a dominant force in shaping culture itself, the attributes of fandom - passion, communal engagement, and the personal investment of fans - become pivotal in understanding consumer relationships with luxury brands. Matthew Guschwan's examination of participatory culture becomes particularly prescient in this context, revealing the ways in which fans do not merely consume but actively participate in the construction and dissemination of brand narratives.

The recent rise in fandom engagement within the luxury fashion sector allows a unique lens through which to view the branding strategies of these fashion houses. As fashion moves away from being a niche interest and becomes a central part of mainstream culture, the logics of fandom that were previously reserved for more accessible forms of culture, begin to apply to the formerly exclusive domain of high fashion. This shift is manifest in the digital engagement strategies employed by luxury brands, which seek to harness the power of community and shared passion that is emblematic of fan culture. Brands are leveraging digital media to cultivate a type of fandom around their identities, thus embracing the participatory and emotionally charged nature of fandom to enhance their cultural resonance and consumer loyalty.

Luxury brands are also tapping into the collective knowledge and enthusiasm of their followers by using social media platforms to create a dialogue with and among their consumers. This engagement reflects a shift in the role of the consumer from a passive spectator to an active participant, mirroring the transformation observed in fandom communities, where the fan is not just a consumer but also a creator, critic, and promoter. The intersection of luxury fashion and fandom cultures thus represents a dynamic synergy, wherein the fervor of fandom provides a potent force for brands to construct a strong, emotionally invested community.

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Incorporating the concept of fandom into the discourse on luxury fashion branding opens up new avenues for examining how brands can cultivate loyalty and engagement. The passionate nature of fandom, once relegated to the domain of “low” culture, offers a framework for understanding how high fashion can foster deep, enduring relationships with consumers. As luxury brands navigate the contemporary digital environment, they are increasingly adopting the logics of fandom, transforming their approach to branding from one of exclusivity and inaccessibility to one that is more inclusive and participatory, inviting fans to not only partake in the luxury experience but to actively shape it.

Gone are the days when luxury was consumed passively. Today's high fashion followers are akin to fans: they curate, create, and participate in the brand narrative actively. They are not only knowledgeable about their beloved brands but also play a crucial role in the distribution and interpretation of their messages. In this way, the fans of fashion brands mirror those of low culture fandoms, building communities, sharing content, and even influencing the direction of the brands they follow.

The fervor of fan involvement in fashion branding occasionally takes on orchestrated forms, where brands deliberately leverage fan labor as a marketing strategy. A notable example is the Yeezy Gap release\(^3^3\), where fans were prompted to rummage through large containers of unmarked clothes, transforming what might seem like a mundane act into an exclusive treasure hunt. This tactic not only generated immense buzz but also played into the creation of a cult following, as fans actively participated in a unique brand experience. At streetwear conventions, fan labor is further showcased as attendees curate their outfits, engage in panel discussions, and

contribute to the zeitgeist that defines the brand's cultural standing. Fan-shot lookbooks amplify this phenomenon, with enthusiasts staging and photographing their own styled ensembles, effectively bridging the gap between brand identity and individual expression. These activities, while orchestrated by brands, are not mercenary tasks but are born from a genuine passion for the brand, reinforcing its status and expanding its reach in a way that feels organic and fan-driven. This symbiotic relationship between brand strategy and fan labor underscores a new paradigm in fashion branding, where fans are not just consumers but co-creators of the brand story.

Social media platforms and in-app curated experiences have become the new venues for luxury brand fandom, where followers can express their loyalty, participate in brand narratives, and even contribute to the brand’s cultural capital. In this landscape, digital engagement acts as the new frontier for luxury brands to expand their influence, offering a different kind of product: one that is less about physical goods and more about experiences, feelings, and community.

By incorporating the dynamics of fandom into their branding strategies, luxury fashion brands are not merely reaching out to potential customers: they are inviting them into an ongoing dialogue, a shared narrative where the brand and the consumer co-create the future of luxury. This participatory culture, drawn from the playbook of “low culture” fandoms, is shaping the way luxury fashion is marketed, consumed, and experienced in the digital age.
Chapter Three: Media Representations of Brands

Media representations of fashion brands function as a complex language of signs, symbols, and spectacles that shape public perception and construct the desirability of luxury. By analyzing semiotic theory\(^\text{35}\), as developed by Roland Barthes, one can decode the narratives spun by fashion brands in their media portrayals. The unfinished hem of an otherwise luxury dress shirt or the delicate drape of a silk gown transcends the material to communicate status, taste, and identity. These elements are signifiers, deliberate choices that convey a message to the initiated, an insider language that distinguishes between those who understand the nuances of fashion and those who do not.

Fashion's mediation through various platforms has rendered it a form of communication where the narrative and context in which clothing is consumed are as significant as the clothing itself. Thus, a Barthesian semiotic approach enables an understanding of how fashion brands use media to shape their narratives. The media acts as a vehicle for brands to broadcast these signifiers to a broader audience, interweaving cultural narratives with marketing strategies, thereby crafting an image that appeals to the consumer's desire for identity and belonging.

The spectacle in fashion branding is a critical manifestation of the brand's identity and a strategic tool for imprinting its image in the collective consciousness. Referencing Guy Debord's concept of *The Society of the Spectacle*\(^\text{36}\), these orchestrated events are more than mere showcases of the latest designs; they are performances that fuse the imagery of the collections

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with a storyline that resonates with the audience on an emotional level. In employing *The Society of the Spectacle*, fashion brands leverage the idea that modern life is profoundly mediated by images, transforming collections into a grand narrative that captivates the public gaze. These spectacles often adopt elements of Debord's model such as the creation of pseudo-needs and the commodification of experience\(^{37}\), inviting the audience to a visceral engagement with the brand's vision that transcends the mere aesthetic of the clothing to include the entire lifestyle and ethos that the brand represents. Through these immersive events, fashion brands orchestrate a powerful visual dialogue that not only markets their products but also solidifies their place within the cultural zeitgeist. The spectacle is carefully designed to leave an indelible mark, as demonstrated by the Balenciaga Mud Show\(^{38}\), which recontextualized the luxury fashion experience within a raw, almost primordial setting, generating extensive conversation and engagement far beyond the immediate fashion audience.

Similarly, Coperni's spray-on dress event\(^{39}\) stands as a contemporary exemplar of spectacle in fashion branding. It occurred as the capstone to their Spring Summer 2023 show, when celebrity-status supermodel Bella Hadid walked out wearing only a pair of underwear, and stood as she was sprayed with a wool-polymer liquid\(^{40}\) that turned into a wearable fabric, before walking off the runway to end the show. This moment, where science and fashion met in a live demonstration, showcased innovation in textile technology while also cementing the brand's

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reputation for pushing the boundaries of fashion presentation. Such spectacles are not mere displays; they are narratives that solidify the brand's ethos in the viewers' minds, capitalizing on the immediate and wide-reaching impact of social media to amplify their message.

The democratization of luxury through digital media has opened up once-exclusive fashion shows to a global audience. With the advent of live streaming and online platforms, luxury fashion has become an accessible experience, challenging brands to maintain a sense of exclusivity amidst widespread availability. This expanded access transforms the fashion spectacle from an exclusive event into a shared global experience, compelling brands to balance the allure of exclusivity with the advantages of extensive reach.

Media representations are also shaped significantly by the involvement of celebrities and influencers who bring their own narratives and cultural capital to fashion branding. These partnerships often lead to a co-mingling of personal brand identities with that of the fashion brand, resulting in a more nuanced and potentially powerful brand image. The Mud Show’s – officially known as the Spring Summer 2023 collection, opened with Kanye West. The show went immediately viral for the visceral commentary on the juxtaposition of luxury and reality, intentionally provoking thoughts on the established norms of fashion. The use of Kanye, a celebrity known for challenging the status quo, underscored Balenciaga's message of anti-conformity and its ambition to reach an audience that values depth and commentary in their fashion choices. The provocative nature of the show, referencing current events such as the mass grave discovered in Ukraine\(^1\), was a deliberate move to align the brand with a narrative of resilience and truth, targeting a demographic that is conscious of global socio-political issues and looks for authenticity and statement-making in luxury fashion. This show’s extensive media

\(^1\) "Balenciaga SS23 Collection." *Vogue UK*. [www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/gallery/balenciaga-ss23](http://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/gallery/balenciaga-ss23).
coverage brought Balenciaga's vision to a broader audience and also embedded the brand deeper into the cultural conversation.

Media representations of fashion brands, therefore, are multilayered constructions that leverage the symbolic language of fashion to create and communicate brand identities. They combine the physical attributes of the garments with the emotional resonance of the brand’s narrative, the spectacle of the presentation, and the cultural capital of celebrity involvement. These representations are not static; they are dynamic and evolving, shaped by the ongoing dialogue between the brand and its audience in the digital space.

The implications for fashion branding are significant. In the context of an increasingly digitized world, the effective use of media representations can dictate the success and resonance of a brand. As brands vie for attention in a crowded digital marketplace, the ability to craft compelling narratives through the strategic use of signs and spectacles becomes paramount. It is not simply about the clothing, but about the story that the clothing tells and the way that story is shared and experienced by consumers.

The semiotic approach to fashion branding, while rooted in traditional understandings of sign systems, must adapt to the fluidity of the digital realm where meanings can be more mutable and where consumer engagement with the brand narrative takes on a participatory role. The spectacle, in turn, must be crafted with an understanding of its potential reach and the need for a balance between spectacle and substance.

In essence, the media representation of fashion brands is a dance of images, narratives, and experiences that, when orchestrated effectively, cultivates consumer desire and builds brand identity. It is the story told by the brand, the story shared by the audience, and the story

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remembered by the collective that together weave the rich tapestry of modern fashion branding. As this argument has illustrated, in the landscape of fashion branding, media technologies are not mere tools but partners in the creation of the brand narrative, fully intertwined with the evolving lexicon of consumer culture.

In the visual dialogues of fashion, the spectacle extends beyond the immediate impact of a runway show or a campaign. It becomes a conversation starter, a source of engagement that invites participation and interpretation across social platforms. This has been vividly illustrated by events like the Balenciaga Mud Show and Coperni's spray-on dress—both instances where the performance has transcended the catwalk and filtered into the cultural mainstream, sparking dialogue, debate, and a participatory fanfare on social media. These spectacles thus become not just a means of brand expression but a platform for audience interaction, with consumers becoming narrators in the brand’s unfolding story.

The democratization of luxury through digital media has undoubtedly altered the landscape of fashion consumption. With the gates of exclusivity now flung open, luxury brands are tasked with an intricate balancing act: to remain aspirational and accessible simultaneously. As fashion spectacles become a shared global experience, brands have harnessed this new breadth of exposure to foster a sense of community around their narratives, while still preserving the core tenets of luxury and exclusivity that underpin their appeal.

The inclusion of celebrities and influencers as integral components of brand storytelling has further cemented the critical role of media representations in branding. These personalities, through their vast followings and influential status, offer a conduit for brands to reach and resonate with diverse audiences. When a figure like Kanye West or Kim Kardashian aligns with a brand, they are not merely endorsing a product; they are endorsing a narrative, a lifestyle, and a
set of values embodied by the brand. This alliance broadens the narrative scope, giving the brand a more profound, more nuanced presence in the public domain.

The multi-layered nature of media representations in fashion branding is, therefore, a dance of strategic communication and audience engagement. It is a carefully choreographed interplay between brand-created signifiers and consumer-generated narratives that together shape the desirability and identity of fashion brands. These representations, enriched by the semiotic depth of the garments and the emotional resonance of brand spectacles, are dynamic narratives that are constantly shaped and reshaped by the digital discourse.

For fashion brands, this means embracing the changing dynamics of media representation: adopting a semiotic fluidity and spectacle savviness that resonates with the digital native while remaining true to the brand’s heritage. The brand narrative thus becomes an ever-evolving story, co-authored by the brand and its audience in a symbiotic relationship facilitated by media technologies.
Conclusion

After analyzing the case studies presented in chapters one through three, it is apparent that media technologies play a fundamental role in shaping the identities of fashion brands and the desires of their consumers. The thesis has illuminated how the strategic use of these technologies, from fashion films to digital runways, extends beyond mere promotion, inviting consumers into a deeper, more immersive brand experience.

The case studies highlighted how brands like Enfants Riches Déprimés and Maison Margiela leverage media to not just showcase their collections but to narrate a compelling story that resonates with viewers on a deeper level. This approach moves past the tangible aspects of clothing and delves into the emotional and ideological connections that consumers have with brands.

The concept of spectacle within fashion branding also emerged as a potent force in the analysis. Spectacular runway shows and media campaigns serve as narrative vessels, constructing brand identities that are imprinted in public consciousness. These spectacles have been shown to possess the power to evoke emotion and stimulate discourse, significantly impacting brand perception and recall.

Finally, the thesis explored the changing dynamics of luxury through digital democratization. The accessibility of fashion via online platforms has broadened audiences, redefining what exclusivity means in the modern luxury market. This shift demands that brands maintain the allure of exclusivity while also capitalizing on the expansive reach of digital media. Celebrity and influencer collaborations were identified as transformative in the landscape of fashion branding. These partnerships enable brands to align with cultural icons, embedding
themselves more deeply into societal norms and consumer lifestyles. Celebrity-driven campaigns and creative collaborations have been recast from mere endorsements to pivotal elements of brand identity and strategy.

The importance of these findings lies in their application to contemporary and future branding strategies. As the digital world evolves, so too must the approaches fashion brands take to engage and captivate audiences. It is not sufficient to produce high-quality fashion alone: brands must also craft engaging digital narratives and experiences.

In conclusion, this thesis confirms that in a digitally mediated world, the medium through which fashion is presented becomes as crucial as the fashion itself. Media technologies are instrumental in constructing the desirability and identity of fashion brands, emphasizing the need for brands to adapt and innovate continually. The narrative of consumer engagement in fashion branding is one of constant evolution, with media technologies at its heart.
Bibliography


