CONSCIOUS FASHION CULTURE

RETHINKING CONSUMPTION IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

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By its very nature, fashion consumption assumes a diverse and updated relevance in light of social, cultural, and economic transformations. The global fashion industry is undergoing a paradigm shift driven by rapid technological advances (Bertola & Teunissen, 2018; Lee, 2022), increased awareness of environmental sustainability (Heim & Hopper, 2022; Mishra et al., 2020), and the changing values of individuals (Bürklin, 2018; Camacho-Otero et al., 2020; Domingos et al., 2022). These transformations are forcing creative, production, distribution and communication systems and, not least, the "end consumer" to critically reflect on the role and impacts of the fashion system (Luchs et al., 2015). Digital technologies, for example, have revolutionized how fashion is produced, distributed, and consumed. Digital platforms enable unprecedented levels of interaction between brands and consumers, fostering new forms of engagement and co-creation (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019). These are widespread, ubiquitous platforms that expand and fragment the fashion narrative (Sadler, 2021), creating a more interconnected, immediate ecosystem within which to experiment with new systems of relationship and mediation. In addition, the growing recognition of the fashion industry's environmental and social impact has catalyzed a movement toward more sustainable practice. On the one hand, the fast fashion model, characterized by rapid production cycles and disposable garments, is being challenged by consumers and activists calling for greater accountability and transparency (Mazzarella et al., 2019). Conversely, sustainable fashion emphasizes ethical production, resource efficiency and circularity, seeking to minimize negative impacts and promote long-term well-being (Centobelli et al., 2022). Finally, European legislation has been proactive in promoting sustainability within the textile and fashion industries through several key legislative initiatives and strategies aimed at reducing the environmental and social impacts of textile production and consumption (European Commission, 2022; Regulation (EU) 2024/1781 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 Establishing a Framework for the

Setting of Ecodesign Requirements for Sustainable Products, Amending Directive (EU) 2020/1828 and Regulation (EU) 2023/1542 and Repealing Directive 2009/125/ECText with EEA Relevance., 2024).

The term "consumption" is inherently multivalent and nuanced. Its very etymology encompasses several facets: consumption means "transformation" of natural resources into fungible goods, but also of signs and symbols into systems of meaning and value. This dual nature of consumption underscores its complexity. On the one hand, it involves converting resources into products that satisfy human needs and desires (Boivin, 2008). On the other hand, it involves the symbolic process of attributing meanings to these products that resonate within cultural and social contexts (Davis, 1992). This duality is particularly evident in fashion, where clothing has both functional and self-expression purposes.
Consumption also means "destruction", that is, the reduction to nothingness of tangible or intangible elements, in turn rendering them unusable through the very act of use. This aspect of consumption highlights the inherent tension between use and waste. Every act of consumption carries with it a potential for depletion and degradation, whether physical goods or intangible experiences. In fashion, this is manifested in the life cycle of clothing, from creation and use to eventual disposal (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020). The environmental cost of producing and discarding garments is significant and prompts a critical examination of consumption practices and their sustainability. Obviously, in its most common meaning, consumption stands for "use" or "utilization", which consists of the activity of making use of a tangible or intangible item but also, in a broader sense, in the act of enjoying services, experiences or activities that do not involve transformation or destruction. This broader interpretation of consumption emphasizes the experiential dimension, where value derives from enjoyment and engagement with fashion as a social and cultural phenomenon (Woodward, 2007). Fashion

consumption thus encompasses a wide range of activities, from the purchase and use of clothing to its enjoyment in cultural terms to the experience provided by virtual worlds.

The fashion system has always intertwined its practices and processes with this multivalent universe that constitutes the landscape of the consumption system of both the creative, material and human resources along the entire fashion supply chain and the fashion object itself, its images and projections. The interaction between creation and consumption is a distinctive feature of the fashion industry. Designers and brands create products that are functional and charged with symbolic meanings, anticipating how consumers will interpret and interact with them. This relationship extends throughout the supply chain, influencing decisions about material sourcing, production processes, communication strategies, and retail experiences.

In the current digital and sustainable transformation context, this intertwining opens up broad areas for thinking about consumption practices, processes and impacts with a more critical and responsible approach (Colombi & D'Itria, 2023). Digital technologies have expanded the possibilities for creating, sharing and experiencing fashion. Virtual and augmented reality, for example, offer consumers new ways to interact with fashion products and brands, blurring the boundaries between the physical and digital worlds (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2022). These innovations enable more personalized and immersive experiences, fostering deeper connections between consumers and fashion.

On the one hand, focusing on more sustainable forms of natural resource use promotes new business models and circular forms of production, which involve reducing, recovering, and reusing finished products and their waste. Circular fashion models aim to extend the life cycle of garments, reducing the need for new resources and minimizing waste. Practices such as upcycling, recycling, and using sustainable materials are integral to this approach (de Aguiar Hugo et al., 2021). By designing long-lasting products and encouraging practices such as repair and resale, the fashion industry can reduce its environmental footprint and promote a more sustainable consumption pattern.

On the other hand, new forms of collaborative consumption are emerging, aimed at extending the life cycle of products through the adoption of curation practices, re-signification and rethinking. These practices promote more active and conscious consumer participation, emphasizing the shift from passive consumption to an engaged and responsible use of fashion (McNeill & Venter, 2019). Collaborative consumption models, such as clothing rental services, fashion exchanges, and peer-to-peer resale platforms, encourage consumers to share and reuse clothing, reducing demand for new products (Arrigo, 2021). These models not only promote sustainability but also create communities of individuals who share values and practices.

The third issue of Fashion Highlight investigates the dynamics, practices, and impacts of fashion consumption in the light of the transformations taking place, questioning the role and potential that fashion industries, creative communities, consumers and education can express. The issue comprehensively covers the different declinations of contemporary fashion consumption, highlighting the trajectories that shape practices, processes and methods within the context of the - long and complex - fashion value chain. The contributions cover three relevant and promising macro-areas to understand the state of the art of fashion design, manufacturing and consumption and to get a preview of the near future: **Consumed fashion**, with a focus on the economic-productive dimension of fashion within a context for which digital and sustainable transformation is crucial, with necessary implications in terms of reconfiguring and updating processes and competences; **Consumer communities**, through the investigation of new and contemporary orientations towards more responsible and sustainable consumption practices; **Consumer culture**, concerning the dynamics, approaches and practices through which fashion is narrated, conveyed, and experienced.

The first section, **Consumed Fashion**, brings together articles that critically explore the trajectories within which fashion manufacturing systems are evolving, highlighting both the criticalities and impacts of a socio-economic system dominated by hyper-production and hyper-consumption, and outlining and experimenting with new and more responsible approaches to design and manufacturing. Likewise, the selected articles highlight

transformational dynamics involving the fashion "know-how", delving into the implications needed to reconfigure and update processes and skills and emphasizing the need for continuous evolution in how fashion is understood and practiced. These dynamics require a shift in the sector's knowledge base, leading to a re-examination of traditional practices and the development of new sustainable approaches that respond to contemporary transformations.

Jacopo Battisti and **Alessandro Spennato** critically examine the profound impact of fast fashion on individuals and societies in the context of globalization and consumer capitalism. The study explores how the industry's rapid replication of trends and profit motivations have transformed clothing consumption, leading to hyper-consumption and disposability, with negative impacts in terms of economic dependency and inequalities to the detriment of low labour-cost countries. The paper underscores the need to address these systemic injustices through collective action, stressing the importance of prioritizing social and environmental responsibility to envision a more ethical and equitable fashion industry.

Erminia d'Itria and **Chiara Colombi** propose an examination of sustainable innovation dynamics within the fashion industry, scrutinizing various merchandising strategies through fashion companies' case studies. The authors build a system model centered on refashioning, formulated from diverse strategies aimed at enhancing product longevity and curbing overconsumption and overmanufacturing. Through their analysis, they identify three thematic frameworks that encapsulate sustainable design approaches, responsible practices, and conscious consumption strategies, thus providing reference for future research to explore the implications, challenges, and benefits of a viable, eco-sustainable future scenario.

Isabella Alevato and **Stefan Lie** explore the integration of next-generation materials into products with psychological significance to improve consumer acceptance and achieve environmental benefits. The study hypothesizes that customizing products with users' genetic material can better represent their environmental concerns and individuality. Focusing on biofabricated bags, the research moves from secondary research to materials testing and prototyping to investigate whether incorporating the user's genetic material into a bag can symbolize self-extension and advances in materials design, thus supporting environmental sustainability.

Gianni Denaro and **Andrea Pruiti**'s article delves into the evolution of production and consumption paradigms in the fashion industry, highlighting the growing emphasis on customising fashion products through local craftsmanship, an approach considered more environmentally, economically, socially and culturally sustainable. Beginning with a renewed interest in local craft traditions, particularly in Italy, where the "Made in Italy" label exemplifies a fusion of creative manual skills and taste rooted in local tradition, the article explores how designers are integrating these craft practices into industrial production, promoting a new dimension of "know-how" that combines local specificity with industrial processes.

Ludovica Rosato, **Alberto Calleo**, **Simona Colitti**, **Giorgio Dall'Osso** e **Valentina De Matteo** present an interesting case study on a multidisciplinary, multistakeholder model designed for a hybrid research-education-business environment. This model shows how involving research and industry professionals in a collaborative learning model can produce results that address contemporary fashion industry challenges. The study emphasizes the importance of collective intelligence in design-led innovation, particularly in the framework of open innovation, and through the adoption of co-design processes, proposes new strategies for industry transformation, especially in the shaded realm of technical apparel and uniforms.

The article by **Angelica Vandi**, **Paola Bertola** and **Emma Suh** explores the evolution of the concept of "materiality" in fashion, influenced by Industry 4.0 technologies, and its implications in human-computer interaction (HCI). The research, resulting from a collaboration between the Gianfranco Ferré Research Center of the Politecnico di Milano and the Department of Mechanical Engineering at MIT, employs a Reverse Engineering approach to study and deconstruct a garment from the Gianfranco Ferré archive. This process aims to rematerialize the garment and integrate HCI principles into educational applications in culture and design. The results underscore the innovative potential of the fusion of traditional craftsmanship and advanced production, highlighting the democratization and dissemination of archival knowledge through technological hybridization and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The second section, **Consumer Communities**, brings together articles that critically reflect on the changing dynamics of fashion consumption and the growing influence of consumer communities, highlighting their intrinsic motivations and imagining future trajectories. This section analyses how consumer behaviour, social movements and community-led initiatives are reshaping the fashion industry towards sustainability and ethical approaches. By examining different case studies and research findings, the selected articles provide insights into how consumer participation, digital platforms and innovative consumption patterns are beginning to contribute to a more sustainable and responsible fashion ecosystem and what - desirable - impacts they may have on the future of fashion.

Claudia Morea and **Silvia Gambi** explore the central role of consumers in the transition to sustainable fashion. Recent consumer purchasing decisions have shaped new trends and business models, with one segment viewing purchasing as a political choice and in line with European legislation promoting sustainability in the fashion industry. The research surveyed Generation Z to investigate their familiarity with eco-design strategies related to the use phase, revealing a gap between policy and design orientations and actual consumer engagement. The study highlights the need to bridge the gap between policy, design and consumer behaviour for true sustainability in fashion.

Lam Hong Lan and **Donna Cleveland**'s article analyzes the shift to sustainable consumption through pre-owned fashion in Vietnam. The research includes observations of local media, analysis of two major pre-owned fashion platforms, and insights from an online survey of Vietnamese consumers. This comprehensive study reveals how online media, particularly celebrity endorsements and social commerce, contribute significantly to this transformation by building e-communities that support circular fashion practices. The findings reveal that these e-communities are crucial in promoting responsible consumption among Vietnamese youth, driven by economic, environmental, and style considerations that make second-hand fashion attractive.

Iryna Kucher's article examines fashion consumption by analyzing clothing purchase, use, and disposal practices in Denmark and Ukraine. Employing the theory of fashion consumption temporalities, the study analyzes how these practices have evolved due to social changes. Through wardrobe studies of different age groups, the research highlights the unique and common aspects of sustainable clothing consumption among Western and post-Soviet consumers. It also introduces an additional temporality of clothing consumption, challenging previous studies and offering new perspectives for understanding the transition to sustainability in fashion.

Laura Giraldi, **Marta Maini**, and **Francesca Morelli** examine the contemporary fashion consumption landscape, focusing on consumers' growing awareness of sustainability in the fashion industry. Analyzing the current state and highlighting exemplary sustainable practices, the article reveals emerging service design solutions that promote more sustainable and conscious fashion consumption. These practices, such as second-hand shopping, collaborative wardrobe sharing, and clothing customization, reshape consumer experiences and push brands to adapt their communication strategies to appeal to the more conscious Gen Z audience.

Remaining in collaborative fashion consumption practices, **Gabriela Fabro Cardoso** analyzes the final stages of retail dynamics as potential pathways to a more sustainable future, focusing on the distribution and use phases through collaborative consumption models such as resale, rental and subscription services. Through case studies, the research explores the relationship between community involvement in retail activities - such as product authentication, promotion, price negotiation, and transaction completion - and corporate commitments to sustainability, including consumer education on circularity, financial support for sustainable practices, and progress monitoring systems.

Finally, **Giovanni Maria Conti** and **Martina Motta** explore the resurgence of knitwear in the contemporary fashion industry, emphasizing its role as a bridge between creation and consumption and challenging traditional fashion norms. Their qualitative research highlights knitwear's response to changing consumer attitudes, technological advances and global events, showing its potential to promote creativity, sustainability and ethical practices. The article investigates the space created by knitwear, questioning the new role of individuals, who are freer to experiment and experiment with interconnected aspects, breaking

away from being mere consumers and becoming conscious makers.

The third and final section, **Consumer Culture**, presents a selection of articles that aim to analyze, adopting different points of view, the dynamics, approaches and practices through which fashion is narrated, transmitted and experienced. This section explores fashion narratives and recent evolutions in terms of languages, content and formats, focusing on the impact of digital technologies. Examining historical perspectives, philosophical readings and the transformative power of digital media, these articles offer a comprehensive understanding of how consumer culture shapes and is shaped by fashion. The studies provide insights into the cyclical nature of fashion, the intersection of fashion and social class, the emerging role of the metaverse, the motivations behind digital fashion consumption, and the implications of technologies in sustainable fashion.

Karmen Samson opens the discussion with a theoretical reflection on fashion as an "economy of the ephemeral", emphasizing its cyclical and transitory nature within consumer culture. Using the concepts of "blooming" and "decay", the author elucidates the temporal dynamics of fashion, integrating these natural processes with the temporal politics of industry. By investigating the interplay between time, consumerism, and fashion's impermanence, the article provides a deeper understanding of cycles that extend beyond traditional notions and presents a detailed and nuanced analysis of fashion's fleeting essence, encouraging to reconsider the significance of decay within the fashion industry.

Shajwan Nariman Fatah's article delves into the social dynamics captured in the narratives of the Toile de Jouy textile through a philosophical perspective. This study aims to reveal the fundamental connection between working-class labor and bourgeois consumption patterns as depicted in Toile de Jouy. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Karl Marx and Jean Baudrillard, the research examines the links between fashion, production methods, consumer behavior, and the concept of simulation, highlighting how the capitalist system commodifies/appropriates the product without regard for its aesthetic qualities, labor origins, or intrinsic value.

Finally, diving into the impacts of digital technologies on fashion consumption, **Romana Andò**

delves into the emerging and evolving concept of the Metaverse within the fashion industry. Through qualitative research focused on international Millennials and Generation Z consumers, the study explores the meanings associated with the Metaverse, its intersection with the digitization of fashion and digital apparel, and its target audience's media literacy and expectations. The investigation highlights the relationship between fashion and individual self-presentation in the Metaverse and examines how these digital environments are transforming consumption processes in the fashion industry.

Adil Boughlala and **Silvia Mazzucotelli Salice**'s article explores the intricate relationship between contemporary fashion consumption and digital tools, from pre-purchase browsing to post-purchase sharing on social media. The study delves into the growing field of digital fashion, particularly the motivations behind consumer adoption of digital fashion end products such as NFT fashion, video game skins, and AR filters. The research, adopting a mixed-media approach, examines the profiles and cultures surrounding digital fashion consumption, suggesting that digital fashion contributes significantly to identity formation and self-expression, creating a new "phygital" hybrid identity paradigm in which the physical and digital realms merge, reinforcing socio-cultural dynamics within brand communities.

By means of data from web platforms and social media recommendation systems, **Tommaso Elli** proposes research to identify and analyze significant local projects in sustainable fashion and design initiatives in the Milanese context. The research aims to investigate the relationships between urban actors, highlight key sustainability advocates, and evaluate the effectiveness of digital methods in studying local phenomena. The results demonstrate the potential of these methodologies to improve the understanding and promotion of sustainable practices in fashion and design.

To conclude, **Ermanno Petrocchi** investigates the influence of persuasive technologies on consumer behavior in sustainable fashion. The study addresses the ethical concerns surrounding sustainability labels and their implementation within digital platforms, highlighting potential consumer risks in the digital age. By analyzing consumption patterns and consumer preferences, the paper reveals how persuasive technologies can manipulate individuals with weak preferences for

sustainable fashion, thereby affecting the formation and expression of their identity.

Together, these sections offer a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted nature of fashion consumption in the contemporary world. By examining the economic, social and cultural dimensions of consumption, the issue provides a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the fashion industry today. Contributors highlight the critical need for a more responsible and reflective approach to fashion consumption that recognizes the interconnectedness of production, distribution and use and the potential for more sustainable and ethical practices. Through this critical lens, this issue thus advances the discourse on sustainable fashion and deepens understanding of the changing landscape of fashion consumption.

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