



Towards a More Elaborate Understanding of the Fashion Photoshoot – An Aesthetic Production with the Element of Age

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Abstract. While agendas of diversity and inclusion seem to flourish and thrive in many instances, we still often experience a gap between agendas and practice. Such is also the case in fashion marketing. We are witnessing a hesitant development when it comes to brands' usage of mature models, and it sparks curiosity as to the causes of the slow phase. Are we witnessing a resistance to a potential “silverization” in fashion branding, or is the production of marketing material more complex than top-management's decisions to signal diversity in tune with the times? As a step towards mapping the different elements constructing the visual marketing material and discussing the possible significance of age on the set, this work in progress shares the framework and the design of research with the purpose of engendering reflection of *how* we can investigate the aesthetic production of visual material in the fashion industry and discuss the significance of our findings.

Keywords: Fashion · Age · Aesthetics · Mature Models · Visual Communication

1 Introduction

Marketing material from the fashion industry is as abundant as the industry's production, but it does not always create the intended engagement in the form of a click or purchase. While the industry grapples with the requirements for sustainability, it is also struggling to find its feet in relation to the new agendas of diversity and inclusion. Gender and body type are two of the diversity forms quite regularly seen on screens and catwalks, but older age is still up-and-coming. It seems to be waiting in the wings for a major cast [16,20]. Academic studies of the contents and values of the fashion marketing in relation to age leave a series of unanswered questions because of the obvious impossibility of knowing *how* the marketing material was produced, and *why* the result was regarded desirable [1].

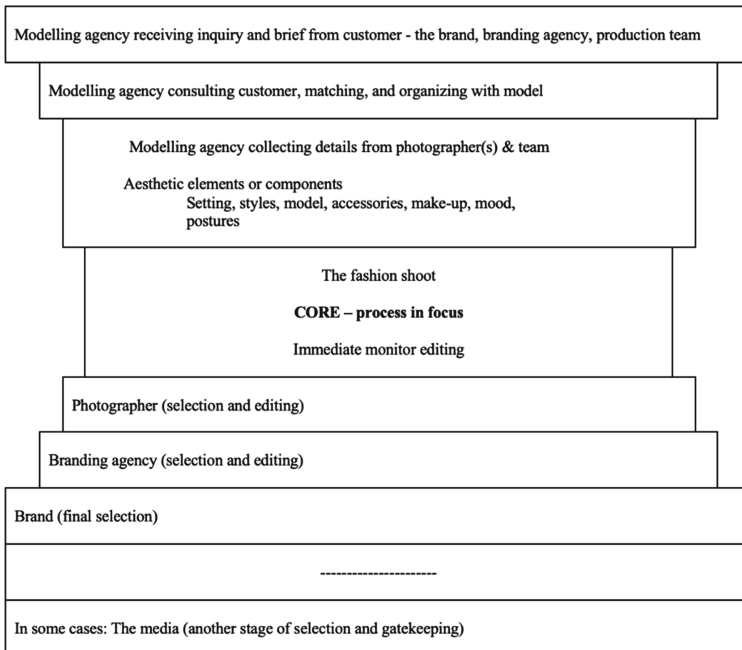
Consequently, *the final version of this article will explore the aesthetic process of the fashion photoshoot by mapping the different elements constructing the visual marketing material and discussing the possible significance of age on the shoot.* The article intends to dig deeper and go beneath the glossy surface in order seek an understanding of the elements, choices, and exchanges constituting the building blocks on the shoot. *The*

contribution of this work in progress is to share the design of the approach and inspire reflection as to investigation into the area of aesthetic production. It seeks to contribute to creating a discussion of our findings from the fashion industry and its venture towards the construction of diversity in fashion marketing.

2 The Fashion Shoot in Its Context

An attempt to understand the complexity of the aesthetic production process of fashion marketing calls for more than a deep dive into one of its elements. Regarding it in a production context, the photo shoot is one stage of what may be regarded as longer supply chain in the production of visual marketing material. The aesthetic production model in Table 1 gives an overview of the entire production process which may last for several months. The table has been developed based on the observation of the actions before, during and after the fashion shoots in 2021 and 2022 informing the preliminary work for the article and the framework for analysis. The final edition of the article will elaborate on relevant elements and perspectives of the table’s phases surrounding the fashion shoot.

Table 1. The aesthetic production model.



Whereas Entwistle reflects on specific characteristics of aesthetic economies and markets on her way to examining the calculations between the economic and the cultural

values in actors' journeys in the fashion network, this article has a distinct focus on the complexity of the fashion shoot. Entwistle follows the male models' journey through the network with an eye to how aesthetic value of models is created, accrued, and attributed in the network but in this work, the attention is on the production of visual marketing material. Furthermore, this article does not consider the position or reputation of participants of the aesthetic teams in the fashion network with a view to discussing their status "out there". It studies the process on the shoots as micro-networks to inquire into the aesthetic development of visual material [3].

The shoots where data collection took place produced commercial material for marketing in the categories B2B (mainly for sales to professionals in fashion retail) as well as B2C (the general public). The brands observed were Swedish, Danish, and Irish international brands, and the material produced was for usage on a variety of platforms and locations as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Platform and formats of visual material produced.

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|---|
| <p>Online Social media, corporate websites, web shops, instore digital, video marketing, e-mail marketing, newsletters, and TV commercials.</p> |
| <p>Print Instore, out-of-home (billboards and posters), brochures, leaflets etc.</p> |
| <p>Formats The commercial formats of the material ranged from image campaigns, seasonal campaigns, lookbooks to editorials in fashion magazines.</p> |

3 Methodology

The study is comprised of 8 case studies which apart from producing an overview and discussion of the aesthetic process aims to shed light on the complexity of aesthetic production for commercial purposes. The final study also aims to establish if age plays a part, and if it does, which part does it play? The collection of cases as data carries an element of convenience sampling, as they were selected from the researcher's bookings as a model in the fashion and beauty industries [13]. They have however been selected from a larger pool of bookings fulfilling the criteria that on the set were at least two models of different ages, and that the session was a photo and video production rather than for example a fashion show. As the cases were not selected with a view to other characteristics or properties which could affect the contents and type of data input, the sampling method does not interfere with the purpose of the article.

The case study may be regarded as a linear process with repeated steps of collection, organization of data and reflection on design, and analysis [21]. The first two steps were carried out during 2022 in Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. The initial steps were preceded by participation in and observation on 11 photo shoots during the second half

of 2021 with the purpose of determining a preliminary data structure and identifying a draft for recurrent themes, or *observation points*, compatible to research. This reflexive prototyping process of constructing the framework for observing, organizing, and later analysing data was carried out with a view to provide greater stability in the subsequent processes of the final article.

As the model and the researcher is the same person, the collection of material entails elements of participatory research. However, the model is not part of the verbal exchange and decision making of the aesthetic process but active in front of the camera co-creating the aesthetics of the visual elements with the photographer. Given the combined situation of participation and observation, objectivity is a central concern. The notes from the shoots were produced after each session, and this helped preserve an objective angle on the observations. Additionally, the analytic focus is on the process and development not on the model's personal outcome which aids the preservation of objectivity. In this respect it may be noticed that the entire team has the construction of fashion marketing material as a common aim, and the limited time for the production minimizes focus on personal gains. Finally, the model is often the last participator to arrive at the set, and often some of the other contributors cooperate more frequently. For the final article it may be explored and discussed to which extent the fashion shoot can be regarded as a field as defined by Bourdieu with relations and its own logic [14, 15]. However, the aim of the article is not to investigate the power relations or struggle for capital. Consequently, also the considerations of field theory regarding participants' power are left aside, as is the case in the studies of Kuipers, Holla and Van Der Laan on value production in the fields of fashion [5].

With a view to analysis, the data is subjected to three phases. First, the data in the form of observation material (shoot notes) for each shoot was organized into the same design with a sequence of themes or observation points. The points are areas and phases which are present in most productions observed, and they function as a set of fixed and comparable phenomena which can support cross-case discussion [19]. The second phase, will be coding, reviewing, and comparing the data from the 8 shoots to gather and reflect on any patterns, similarities, or differences. The third phase entails analyses of the material with the purpose of examining the possible significance, meaning and effect of the observations in relation to the complexity of the aesthetic process.

The approach is exploratory rather than confirmatory, and this allows the researcher to pursue the data complexity with an inquisitive mind and address rival explanations in patterns as they may appear. As previous research into marketing with mature models in the fashion industry has pointed to open ends and room for further debate regarding the brands' intentions when including silver models, it is imperative that this work operates in an exploratory manner if a more detailed understanding of the aesthetic process is to be the outcome [1].

4 The Fashion Shoot, Its Practices and Market Culture

The fashion shoot may be regarded as cultural practice producing local versions of the contemporary fashion marketing aesthetics. Not necessarily local in the geographical sense but more residing within the norms of the fashion industry as micro locations

of taste and aesthetic choices while also embedded within the borders of the brand universe. The aesthetic team produce based on the cultural taste of all aesthetic workers contributing to the process at the site of production. Each team deliver their collective take into the meta-aesthetic of the fashion industry and may be regarded as a team of cultural, aesthetic contributors by the sum of their choices. Similar observations are made by Manovich concerning the production of social media photos in different geographical and cultural locations [7, 8]. It follows that the aesthetic workers all share a common cultural ground in the fashion industry which they are a part of. Presumably, they are all familiar with the industry's attribution of values and of the elements constituting the building blocks of aesthetic value. However, they have been hired to interpret and deliver their specialty into the overall culture. Consequently, what takes place on the set may be regarded as a cultural practice where the aesthetic workers are part of an exchange regarding taste or a creation process towards a product of taste. The application of the term and concept of *building blocks* supports the identification of the elements in the process and the discussion of their significance [4]. In this respect, the final article may benefit from a stratification in the discussion of the building blocks into a superficial level and a deeper level of meaning and significance.

Additionally, such discussion can be related to the state of age diversity in fashion as unfolded by studies considering the possible reasons for this. Research shows that when inquiring into advertising agencies executives' recommendations for ads to feature an older central model in the targeting of an older audience, as many as 37% would not recommend an older model in ads for clothing and cosmetics [19]. In addition, Schroder and Borgerson find that the customary ways of marketing construct a realism working as a foundation of identity construction for customers. A foundation with a conventional representation [18].

Also representation in fashion magazine illustrate a relevant dimension of the market culture. When analysing body image diversity in Australian fashion magazines, a study from 2015 found that only one percent of the visual representation could be classified as older [2]. Finally, in 2007 a visual content analysis of eight American fashion magazines demonstrated that visible signs of aging were absent from their photographs, even though almost all magazines had 50% or more of their readership above the age of 35 [6]. In relation to these findings, it is worth noticing that other studies of the fashion-conscious crowd show that they often have younger cognitive ages, are more ready to try new products and demonstrate different value orientations [11, 12].

5 The Framework of Observation Points

The framework of observations points applied for structuring and subsequently analysing the data is presented in Table 3.

In connection with the analyses of the data and the subsequent discussion of the findings, the framework of the data and the findings may be discussed in a reflection towards Schroeder's five variables for critical visual analysis [17]. These variables are also applied by McFarlane and Samsioe in their work with 50+ fashion Instagram influencers are: description, subject matter, form, medium, style and genre [9, 10]. As the practices of the fashion shoots deliver into a system of application where these variables

reside, they may serve as points of reflection in a discussion after a structured analysis, and they may guide as landmarks regarding the aesthetic material's practical application.

Table 3. Framework of observation points organizing data from fashion shoots.

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| Framework of observation points |
| Organization of shoot Primary scene-setter Level of detail in layout Moodboard, other visual preparation Booker of model |
| Model characteristics in a diversity perspective Age difference, model relationship, ethnicity, body type etc. |
| Aesthetic process Setting, styles, accessories, make-up, lightening, model, poses, mood Styling Make-up and hair – model character Responsible for outfit selection, styling preparation Who decided what – role and responsibility Negotiation and agreement Deviations from plans (outfits, styling, location) |
| Who wore what Age-related differences in outfit styles, hair, make-up etc. |
| Application of material Fashion editorial, image campaign etc. |
| The story and style of the material Synergy between setting, style, mood, vibe of the aesthetic components, positioning of models and model roles. |

6 Discussion and Conclusion

This work in progress is relevant as a contribution towards more detailed insight into the aesthetic process at the fashion shoot as it is a step towards understanding the complexity of the aesthetic perspectives in the production of visual marketing material in a more precise and nuanced manner. In turn, the final article's analysis and discussion may serve as a qualified basis for further inquiry into more stages both before and *after* the shoot where numerous decisions are made as to the final selection, editing of style and mood of the material and its eventual usage and publication. This will guide us towards an appreciation of the development towards greater diversity as well as the reasoning, and the ascription of values in the aesthetic process producing the visual marketing of

fashion with the application of mature models. A central genre for our perception of the industry, its values, and positioning of people in relation to age diversity.

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