

# The Progressive Consumer:

Changing the Landscape of Market Dynamics



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## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1.</b>	5
1.1. Abstract	6
1.1.1. Purpose	6
1.1.2. Method	6
1.1.3. Findings	6
1.1.4. Research Limitations	6
1.2. Introduction	7
1.3. Structure of Study	11
1.4. Problem Statement	14
1.5. Delimitation	14
1.5.1. Limiting the Industry	14
1.5.2. Limiting the Market	15
1.5.3. Limiting Research Methods	16
1.6. Literature Review	17
1.7. Methodology	20
1.7.1 Theory of Science	21
1.7.2. Social Constructivism	22
1.7.3. Research Philosophy - Ontology and Epistemology	23
1.7.4. Research Approach - An Inductive Approach	24
1.7.5. Research Strategy	25
1.7.6. Choices	25
1.7.6. Time Horizons	27
1.7.7. Data Collection and Analysis	27
1.7.8. The ethics of the thesis	29
<b>Chapter 2.</b>	31
2.1. The Fashion Industry	32
2.2. Diversity	36
2.3. An intersectional Approach to Diversity Research	40
Consumers	41
2.4. Consumer Culture Theory	41
2.5. Consumer Behaviour	43
2.6. Social Identity Theory	45
2.7. Social Impact Theory	48
2.8. Communication	49
2.8.1. Online Communication	50
2.8.2. Word-of-Mouth Communication	50
2.8.3. Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication	51
2.8.4. Visual Rhetoric	52

2.9. Marketing	54
2.9.1. Traditional Marketing	54
2.9.2. Digital Marketing	54
2.9.3. Social Media Marketing	55
2.9.4. Electronic Word-of-Mouth	57
2.9.5. Brand Community for Marketing Purposes	58
2.9.6. Social Marketing	59
2.10. The State of Fashion 2019: A Year of Awakening	59
<b>Chapter 3.</b>	62
3.1. The Current Concept of Consumer Identity	63
3.1.1. A New Consumer	63
3.1.2. Brand Communities	65
3.1.3. Communication	67
3.1.4. Identity	69
3.1.5. Identity Going Online	70
3.1.6. Portrait of the Modern Day Consumer	71
3.1.7. Diversity	72
3.1.8. Subconclusion	73
3.2. Consumer Perspectives on Diversity in the Women's Fashion Industry	74
3.2.1. Survey Results	74
3.2.2. Exploring the Results of the Survey	76
3.2.3. Subconclusion	80
3.3. Embracing Diversity	81
3.3.1. The Changing Consumer and Consumer Demands	81
3.3.2. Building a Diversity-Inclusive Brand Through Communication	83
3.3.3. Building a Diversity-Inclusive Brand Through Marketing	86
3.3.4. Building a Diversity-Inclusive Brand Through Social Marketing	88
3.3.5. Applying the Perspectives of Social Identity Theory and Social Impact Theory	90
3.3.6. Examining Collaborations as a Diversity-Focused Marketing Tool	91
3.3.7. Subconclusion	95
3.4. A Discussion of How Consumer Culture Shape Diversity Movements in the Women's Fashion Industry	95
3.4.1. Reviewing Diversity from a Consumer Culture Theory Perspective	97
3.4.2. Reviewing the Contribution of Cultural Hybridization	100
3.4.3. Subconclusion	102
<b>Chapter 4.</b>	104
4.1. Conclusion	105
4.2. Further Research	110
Bibliography	111
Online Sources	111

	Journals	116
	Books	120
Appendices		122
	Appendix A	122
	Appendix B	124
	Appendix C	126
	Appendix D	128
	Appendix E	152

# Chapter 1.

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the overall problem that is the foundation of the author's' thesis. This is done through an introductory outline of diversity and consumer culture. Furthermore, the problem statement of this thesis is introduced and lastly, the philosophical and methodological considerations are examined, discussed and clarified.

The areas of focus for chapter 1. are as listed below:

- 1.1. Abstract
- 1.2. Introduction
- 1.3. Structure of Study
- 1.4. Problem Statement
- 1.5. Delimitation
- 1.6. Literature Review
- 1.7. Methodology

## 1.1. Abstract

### 1.1.1. Purpose

This thesis investigates the question “How does consumer culture shape diversity movements in the women’s fashion industry?”. This research question takes a look into rapidly changing consumer culture, how consumers are reacting, and what this means for brands and their future image.

### 1.1.2. Method

The methodological process of this thesis is constituted from the structure of “the Research Onion”. Firstly, the chosen scientific approach is social constructivism allowing for researching and analyzing from a socially constructed interpretation producing subjective findings rather than objective truths. Secondly, the research approach of this thesis has been inductive, since the research is based both on theory and on primary data collected for the thesis. It is furthermore aimed towards identifying patterns from the research that can be applicable to brands. Lastly, research ethics was applied throughout the data collection.

### 1.1.3. Findings

The research findings highlighted the changing nature of modern day consumer culture and its effects in the women’s fashion industries. To gain a full understanding, research has been conducted in order to introduce the concept of a “portrait of the modern day consumer”. Survey results from consumers further verified the consumer portrait. With the gathered information important changes and suggestions were created for marketers in order to maintain or gain market power in today's modern consumer culture climate.

### 1.1.4. Research Limitations

For the purpose of investigating the subject of this thesis effectively, some research limitations were set. First of all, the area of focus was limited to only the women’s fashion industry, rather than the fashion industry as a whole. Secondly, the market that is being investigated has been limited in the sense that the findings of this thesis mainly is applicable for high-street brands rather than brands of all sizes. The carried out research and investigation of this thesis is primarily focused on a consumer perspective. However, perspectives of brands have been considered in the third subsequent question. Regarding research methods, limitations were made as well in this area. The primary data collected for the analysis has been quantitative rather than qualitative in order to gain broader insights into consumer intentions and actions. For this purpose, we created a survey instead of interviewing the target group.

## 1.2. Introduction

In today's current global climate, the atmosphere is teeming with a push for change. This is evident throughout politics, social movements, pop culture, business, and other areas influencing the current state of the world. In the realm of politics, diversity is starting to gain awareness and momentum; for example the United States elected two muslim women to Congress for the first time ever (Haltiwanger, J., 2018) and Australia passed marriage equality in late 2017 (Evershed, N., 2017). These are among some of the political actions accomplished in the name of diversity through inclusion and equality. Brands are beginning to see results for their inclusivity as well, for instance Rihanna's *Fenty Beauty* line sold \$100 million worth of product within its first 40 days, which was attributed to their inclusion of 40 different shades of foundation that was designed for individuals across the skin color spectrum (Rodulfo, K., 2018). Popular culture is brimming with examples of how diversity is becoming a movement at the forefront of everyone's minds. Films such as *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Black Panther* were some of the highest grossing in 2018 (Gassam, J., 2018), tv shows took it on as a hot topic (Miller, L. S., 2017), and celebrities began speaking out for more diversity. Among the issues celebrities were talking about was the #oscarssowhite which was a large conversation they had in 2018 (Schulman, M., 2018), which is a push for equal representation and opportunity in the film industry. Other social movements have also gained ground in the public sphere, in today's political and social climate. Along with the #Metoo-movement there is the black lives matter movement pushing for "freedom and justice for all black lives" (blacklivesmatter.com, ND), and the #Timesup-movement fighting "sexual assault, harassment, and inequality in the workplace" (timesupnow.com, ND.). These movements, among countless others, not only signify the desire for change but the growing intolerance for ignorance surrounding the issue, whether intentional or not.

This current climate of intolerance towards a lack of inclusivity, means that brands in the fashion industry have found themselves garnering attention when their marketing messages missed the mark. In the current climate there is a call for sensitivity, to ensure that a brands' approach to diversity and inclusion is well thought out. Among more recent incidents of brand missteps, was H&M's ad for children's clothing that consisted of a young black boy wearing a hoodie stating "coolest monkey in the jungle". Due to the historically negative connotation of monkey associated with ethnicity of an african descent (Blakemore, E., 2017), this campaign came off as callous and uninformed. H&M received aggressive backlash from the online

community and found themselves in spotlight for all the wrong reasons (West, S., 2018). However, H&M is only one of many offenders who have been publicly confronted for their insensitive, discriminatory depictions. Pepsi had a highly public controversy which revolved around a commercial that seemingly depicted a generic overall social justice cause that was attended by a largely diverse group of people but the error came when Kendall Jenner, a famous supermodel, diffused tension between the police and protestors by handing them a Pepsi (Yadav, Y., 2017). This was criticized due it being interpreted as her fulfilling the white saviour trope, the belittling of aggressions between protestors and police forces, and the complete lack of awareness on the harm this could cause. Pepsi almost immediately recalled the commercial, but the damage was done (Batchelor, T. & Hooton, C., 2017). This shows that in the age of the internet, paired with people's hyper-awareness for inclusivity that brands need to be aware of social perception now more than ever in order to protect, maintain, and grow their image.

The previously mentioned current state of affairs world wide has been enhanced and spread with the help of the effect of globalization on today's world. Globalization is a complex, dynamic and disjunctive phenomenon that has influenced a number of aspects in contemporary life.

The influence of globalization can be described in the form of different aspects, such as: technological, economical, social and many other facets of life. The effect of globalization has taken the study of consumer identity from a geographical black and white field, into a far more dynamic and multifaceted area of study (Featherstone, M., 2007).

In the fashion industry, globalization is changing the way the dynamics between consumer and market work. Due to globalization the consumer now looks much more multifaceted, meaning that marketing has had to react and adapt to a new fast-paced, consumer-driven landscape. This forces marketers to increase creativity and innovation in order to succeed in reaching this new broad and complicated audience. However, alongside the difficulties this poses, there is also a world of opportunities that have opened up to marketers in the fashion industry. Technological advances have resulted in a possibility of reaching a broad audience with very little effort in terms of time, money, and resources, the creation of an open line of communication between all actors in the market, and a more even playing field for



businesses to market in this industry (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019), these are just a few of the ways that marketing has changed.

Globalization has affected social dynamics world-wide, meaning they are no longer geographically-limited but are now driven by a globally interconnected world. This has sparked a debate around the topic of diversity and inclusivity world wide, that the women's fashion industry is not immune to (Featherstone, M., 2007).

It seems that the effects of globalization, along with the prevalent diverse social landscape, have created consumer driven a demand for inclusivity and change that differ from the previous socially acceptable standards. This begs the questions of how far have we come, and how far do we have left to go? Is 2019 the year, that people of all races, sex, gender, impairments, etc. will be able to identify with whom they are seeing in politics, in industries, in media, and generally speaking in all aspects of society? While there are clear signs that the women's fashion industry is moving in a direction towards increased inclusivity, that is not the case in all aspects nor has it been in the past (Hunt, K., 2017). It is important to note what the fashion industry has looked like up until now in order to understand what changes the industry faces and needs to react to.

The fashion industry is a global, multifaceted, prosperous, and constantly changing industry. It manifested from the concept of clothing as a simple human need for protection from the elements, transforming from a necessity into a large industry. Today the fashion industry is among the top ten largest industries globally (McKinsey & Company & The Business of Fashion, 2019) worth \$1.34 trillion a year, in which women's fashion accounts for 53% of total revenue. It is forecasted that the global apparel retail market will reach \$1.4 trillion by 2021, an increase of 8.1% from 2016 (Common Objective, 2018). The industry consists of many activities to be taken into consideration:

*“the fashion industry encompasses the design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising, and promotion of all types of apparel”.*

(Steele, V., Major, J. S., 2018).

This industry includes diverse consumers and producers, ranging in economic classes, countries of origin, styles, and purpose. These variations have always been present throughout

the industry's existence, but with the age of technology and the increase in personalization and sharing, the industry's lack of diversity and inclusivity is publicly being called into question.

Although there is a current lack of diversity on all fronts of the fashion industry, we will be focusing on the image, or visual rhetoric component, that the industry presents through the marketing materials created. Marketing materials include advertisement, social media presence, runway models/brand ambassadors, webpages, and other representations that consumers can interact with or consume. These range from ads claiming there is only one "perfect body" type (Victoria's Secret - [Appendix A](#)), to a typical fashion runway presentation with only tall, uniform, european looking women (Nanushka's spring 2019 runway - [Appendix A](#)), and even obvious photoshopping creating impossible expectations (Ralph Lauren - [Appendix A](#)), as seen in [Appendix A](#).

The classic standard, created and sustained by the industry, for a model's appearance fell under the category of a more european or western look. It was typical to see models that were above european average height, young, blonde, with sharp features, white, and thin. This look was typical for runways throughout their history in the last half of the 20th century and into the 21st century (Soley-Beltran, P., 2006). This look has been criticized for being racially selective, unattainable, and setting unrealistic expectations for women in regards to what they are supposed to look like. One of the many reasons that this "look" was unrealistic was due to the heavy use of photoshop on marketing materials. With Photoshop, models could be portrayed as impossibly thin, unblemished, having hair only in acceptable places, and other impossible feats. With the increased spotlight from consumers on company behavior there is a demand for change regarding this standard.

Another aspect that is seemingly changing is the way consumers behave. It appears that consumers are becoming increasingly complex. In this day and age, consumers are more conscious decision-makers who have a world of options at their fingertips. At the same time, the changing market landscape, from a physical and traditional marketplace to a more digital easy-to-enter industry, enables consumers to know about and access a multitude of options when looking for a product (Mainwaring, S., 2011). Customers can search for a product, (for example black jeans) online and then pick one of the many options that the search returns with. Not only does search relevance matter but then the customer can go on to read reviews. If there are negative ones the consumer can switch to another brand site with a simple click of a button.

Creating a new critical and inconsistent consumer, with regards to brands, means that companies need to start listening. In this digital landscape of options, word-of-mouth communication, and easily rerouted consumers, brands are more susceptible to the whims of the consumer and need to create a strategy to react to this change.

As societies increasingly start to consist of, or at least acknowledge consisting of various cultures, the necessity for diversity becomes hard to ignore (Wilde, S. J., 2017). Including multiple voices in conversations whether they be about fashion, politics, education, and so on creates a better understanding of the world around us. Not only is there a push for diversity in the women's fashion industry but it is important to look at how the fashion industry has chosen to react to this push. This shift depicts a changing relationship between consumer and brand. Consumers now have a lot to say and their voices are being heard whether it be on ethical issues, product reviews, or sharing their personal vision of an item and brands need to listen because consumers have buying power that can affect brand profit. While this is relevant in terms of diversity in the women's fashion industry, it also goes on to indicate a predominant shift in consumer culture.

Due to the myriad of changes happening within the state of the fashion industry, the marketplace and its consumers, our attention has been drawn to find out how these changes affect brands. As well as how brands can draw an advantage, or simply survive, in this world of constant and fast-paced changes and the increasing demands from consumers. This is the aim of the following research study.

### 1.3. Structure of Study

This thesis consists of four main chapters. The first chapter, Introduction and Methodology, introduces the theme of the thesis, the problem statement, clarifies the research design and the chosen methodology, which includes an account of social constructivism and the quantitative method, and the delimitations considered for the purpose of creating this thesis. Additionally, it provides a review of the literature connected to the field of research. The second chapter, Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework, describes and lists the theories used for explaining and supporting the findings of this thesis. In the third chapter, Chapter 3. Analyses, the questions of the problem statement are researched, evaluated and analyzed. This involves creating a portrait of the modern day consumer, exploring consumer perspectives on diversity in the women's fashion industry and investigating the opportunities that follow this movement for brands in the market. The analysis is divided into four sections, each representing a question proposed in the problem statement. The initial three sections deal with the underlying questions and the last section is where the primary question of this thesis will be explored. The analysis will be based on the theories provided in Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and the findings from the quantitative survey created for consumers of our network. Lastly, the conclusion and future implication are presented in the fourth chapter, Chapter 4. Conclusion and Further Implications. In this chapter, the findings of this thesis are summarized and implications regarding the research are offered. The structure of this thesis is illustrated below:

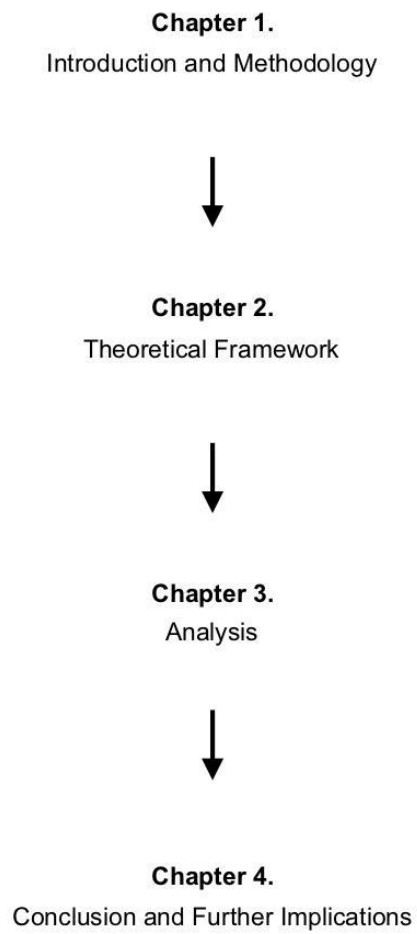


Figure 1. The Structure of the Thesis

## 1.4. Problem Statement

The landscape of the women's fashion industry, the current global climate in regards to social movements, and the changes occurring to consumer culture, make it evident that these factors are an amalgamation of factors that affect each other and play a role in their future. Thus, a primary question has been formed in order to understand these effects and is as follows:

*How does consumer culture shape diversity movements in the women's fashion industry?*

In order to create a comprehensive answer to this question, the following subsequent questions have been included in the research of the primary question:

1. *What is the current concept of consumer identity and how could that be affecting diversity?*
2. *In regards to diversity in the women's fashion industry, what are the consumer perspectives?*
3. *How can brands in the women's fashion industry embrace diversity?*

## 1.5. Delimitation

The following section will cover the boundaries we faced, limiting the aspects of the thesis process.

### 1.5.1. Limiting the Industry

The objective of this thesis is to investigate how consumer culture shapes diversity movements in the women's fashion industry. The fashion industry itself is a medium that is largely visual and focuses mainly on people as the object and buyer. This emphasis on the visual self makes it simple to look for diversity or a lack thereof. From what is viewed, inferences can then be made on the state of the industry. We have chosen to focus on the women's

fashion industry, rather than the entire fashion industry, since this would include a target group that would be too large to reach, investigate and analyze. Not only does this create a narrower field of study but historically speaking women have been more publicly held to a set of particular beauty ideals decided by society. These highly specified ideals range from being about body type, ethnicity, and other qualities that create a very narrow field of what is publicly accepted beauty (Nagar, I. & Virk, R. 2017).

### **1.5.2. Limiting the Market**

The investigation of the problem statement, has been divided into two parts: one being investigating the women's fashion industry from the perspective of consumers, in order to understand the underlying structures of demand for diversity in this specific part of the industry. And a second to explore how this knowledge can be used in a business perspective with the third subquestion of our problem statement: *How can brands in the women's fashion industry embrace diversity?*

In terms of relevance, this research in regards to subsequent question 3 is mostly relevant for high-street brands. This is due to the generalized and broad nature of the suggested marketing approaches that were created for this thesis in section 3.3. While high-end, niche or other types of brands could find some aspects useful towards their marketing research the studies conducted and the findings of this thesis mainly appeals to those with a large and diverse customer base.

Concerning the section revolving around consumers and consumer culture, this research field is vast and constantly adapting. Meaning that while our definition of a consumer is relevant, that may not always be the case. If the introduction of new technology, forms of social media, or anything that changes how people behave, then the current definition could need to be further developed. While our research is contemporarily appropriate, it is important for future studies that those considering this take into account the current environment.

### 1.5.3. Limiting Research Methods

Regarding the type of respondent for the survey, it is clear to see that there is a distinct lack of variety in ethnicity, gender, and age. The respondent tended to be white, female, and in her 20's according to the information gathered (Can be found in [Appendix D.](#)). This lack of diversity in those that took the survey means that the results show mainly the viewpoint of a white, young, female which we argue can heavily influence their view of and relation to the fashion industry and thereby provide a specific outcome that is not necessarily authentic and diverse. This viewpoint will be taken into consideration when analyzing the collected data. Due to the sharing of this survey through personal social networks, it was clear that the majority of respondents would reflect those social networks as young, white, females, because the personal social networks this was shared on mainly consisted of this demographic. The justification of using this type of sharing style will be expanded upon in the methodology section.

As well as having a limited type and size of respondents to the survey, the length and question styles were restricted as well. Due to the survey being voluntary to take and spread through social networks, the investment of our respondents to take the survey in the first place was low. Thus to ensure that more data could be collected it was decided to maintain a shorter and simple question format for the questions that would be asked in the survey. This meant that the questions were not as in-depth as they could possibly be and that some of the responses may be more brief.

It is important to note the respondents were aware that their replies would be viewed by someone. This can influence that responses were created with the intent to be read so they were what the individual chose to say which might not necessarily equate with their actual view or action in regards to the issue of diversity in the women's fashion industry. Especially in this hyper-aware current social landscape, which can make respondents more cautious of not being misconstrued.

Interviews could have been a resource as a complementary feature to expand upon the survey findings. Conducting a survey allows for broader insight into consumer thoughts and opinions rather than the in-depth look into one mindset that an interview would have afforded. The focus on trends in this thesis, with diversity being the main trend, meant that it was more important to attempt to gain the insight of the masses rather than the individual, providing a



more diverse result. The interview format allows for those being interviewed to have more time to think upon and formulate their answers. This can lead to bias based off of what they think should be said, wants to be heard, or any other factors that could influence the way they choose to answer. Since this thesis was also intended to provide an insight into the modern day consumers, it meant that the consumer is the object of our collected research, rather than brands and companies. A brand within the women's fashion industry could have been interviewed to provide a viewpoint from another perspective, however we chose to add the viewpoint from brands from an external source, being the McKinsey report created in collaboration with the Business of Fashion, and then additionally to support this with collecting primary data from the consumers ourselves.

The theory analysis section is mainly composed of theories regarding consumer behavior, perspective, and function, due to the consumer-based research question. This means that the business section is not built to support this from a purely business perspective. In terms of understanding this research from a business perspective, behavioral, and functionality standpoint then external business theory's besides those provided would need to be studied separately.

## 1.6. Literature Review

For the purposes of researching the field of study for this thesis, we have looked at a range of multiple relevant areas. These are: diversity, consumer culture, communications, and marketing. In the following section, we will be critically reviewing the chosen literature within these areas of study. Lastly, we will introduce our own contribution to the chosen fields.

Diversity as a field of study has always been a relevant topic but in the modern age has gained more momentum. Within the research conducted on this topic we put a focus on understanding the many facets that fall under the umbrella of diversity. This method of understanding allowed for a thorough and in-depth understanding of what constituted as diverse. A problem with the field of traditional diversity is that it was too simple and seen as a straightforward issue (Gopaldas, A. & Deroy, G., 2015). For the specific purpose for this thesis regarding the brands in the fashion industry, diversity movements posed an issue due to the complexity of what consumers were demanding from brands. These demands meant that brands need to have a more developed and better understanding of diversity. Gopaldas and

Deroy explored intersectional diversity as a more nuanced and advanced way to approach diversity (Gopaldas, A. & Deroy, G., 2015). However, the field still lacked the complexity that diversity entails today in the women's fashion industry in today's modern climate.

In order to gain a better understand of consumers, whom are the focus of the thesis, consumer culture was a necessary field of study to gain knowledge and perspective in this area of study. The basis of this field is consumer culture theory which entails consumer behaviour, social identity, and social impact in this research. The field of consumer culture highlights the shift of social and cultural experiences being influenced by the marketplace rather than traditional cultural influences, indicating growing market power. However, while this is correct it lacked the ability to take consumer agency into account. This was mended through looking at Askegaard's approach to consumer culture which took consumers decision-making abilities into account and therefore gave a more authentic look into the power dynamics between market and consumer (Askegaard, S., 2018). To further gain understanding of consumer culture in the modern world, cultural hybridization was introduced as an influence by Holton to add relevance to consumer culture in today's global landscape and what that entails for consumer culture (Holton, R., 2000). This gathered definition of consumer culture theory creates an in-depth and modern day approach to understanding consumers.

As found in the research conducted on consumer culture, consumers have agency and decision-making power, it was then important to understand what this meant. Consumer behavior studies the impact that consumers' purchase decisions can have in terms of a consumer's identity, and what those decisions symbolize to others (Arnould, E. & Thompson, C., 2005). While consumer behavior uncovered the importance of identity and outside influences on decision making it lacked an in depth look into what constituted identity and the relevance of the fact that there an outside source that has influence on a consumer. The general field of consumer behaviour was missing nuances that took into account the developing consumer complexity and their demand for brands to understand these demands. In order to gain better understanding for brands to better understand consumers in the women's fashion industry Social Identity Theory was looked at. Social Identity Theory allowed for an understanding of the fabricated nature of identity in the modern age of technology and the complexity which it creates for understanding consumers and what they want (Tajfel, H., 1974). To comprehend the effect that outside influences had Social Impact Theory was researched in regards to the power that influence has and how brands can better understand it for marketing purposes. Consumer

behavior with connection to Social Identity Theory and Social Impact Theory creates more understanding on what drives consumers in the consumer culture area of study rather than researching the area with only a general perspective on what constitutes consumer behaviour.

Communication is a key part of brand/consumer relationships that required research in order to understand and use it in this thesis. Sharing has become a popular way communication enforcing the idea that much of communication is focused on information exchange. Duncan and Moriarty delve into the idea that communication is more about relationships and meanings rather than being a simply functionally purposed tool as the field of communication previously reflected. Their findings revealed the importance of communication for brands to understand to use communication to build better brand image and relationships with consumers (Duncan, T. & Moriarty, S.E., 1998). This idea then needed to be shifted to the digital realm of online communication which was quickly taking over as a primary method of communication between consumers and brands. This shift can be seen through the emergence of Electronic word-of-mouth as an important concept from brands to take notice of and deal with (Sandes, F.S. & Urdan, A.T., 2013). Communication in the traditional sense did not take the visual components of the women's fashion industry into account, thus visual rhetoric was used as a part of the communication field of study. Visual rhetoric is a large component of how the fashion industry conveys messages to its consumers and helped to further understand the style of communication by and between consumers and brands.

Marketing as a field of research is traditionally an oversimplified concept that does not take modern day advancements into account. Much of marketing has moved over to a digital medium, creating online marketing which is quick and has a dynamic nature making much of marketing literature obsolete and outdated. A large part of online marketing consists of social media marketing, which needs to take into account the public nature of social media and its ability to spread information at rapid rates, whether it be positive or negative (Azemi, Y. & Ozuem, W., 2018). The expeditious and continuous changing state of technology means that marketing literature needs to be constantly updated or the context in which it was written must be taken into account.

Another aspect to take into account when approaching marketing is the status of the brand identity, whether it has one or is building one. Brand communities can be powerful tools that influence how successful a marketing effort could be, therefore research was collected to

better understand brand communities and their effects on marketing. However, within the field of marketing it is important to understand the complicated nature of marketing efforts which was identified and explained through the aforementioned marketing topics.

Each field of research covered is missing some kind of perspective or contribution in order to effectively investigate and answer the primary question of this thesis, which is “*How does consumer culture shape diversity movements in the women’s fashion industry?*“. An important factor for answering this question is understanding the consumer. In section 3.1.6. through analysis of current theory and factors the “Portrait of the Modern Day Consumer” was built in this thesis to create a modern updated introspective understanding of the consumer. Furthermore, through the combination and analysis of the research done in the areas of study along with the primary data collected for this thesis we have contributed a specific research method. This research method can be applied to different social movements, industries, and marketing purposes to better understand consumer and brand interactions.

## 1.7. Methodology

The following chapter addresses the philosophical, and subsequently explains the methodological considerations, which are relevant for the research conveyed in this thesis. Firstly, choices of research design are discussed and clarified. Afterwards, choices of empirical data of the thesis are outlined and discussed to give an overall view of the chosen research methods and their validity.

In order to approach the methodological process in a structured way, the point of departure is based on “The Research Onion” by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill. The model is divided into six layers that describe the different stages that a researcher should follow when creating an effective methodology. The layers are divided in six main areas: Research Philosophy, Research Approach, Research Strategy, Research Choices, Time Horizons and Techniques, and Procedures (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill., 2005). The methodological process will be reviewed gradually from the outside working towards the inside, or center, of the model to describe the chosen methodological approach applied for this (See Model 1. below). This chapter will furthermore describe the empirical collection of data together with a clarification of choices made.

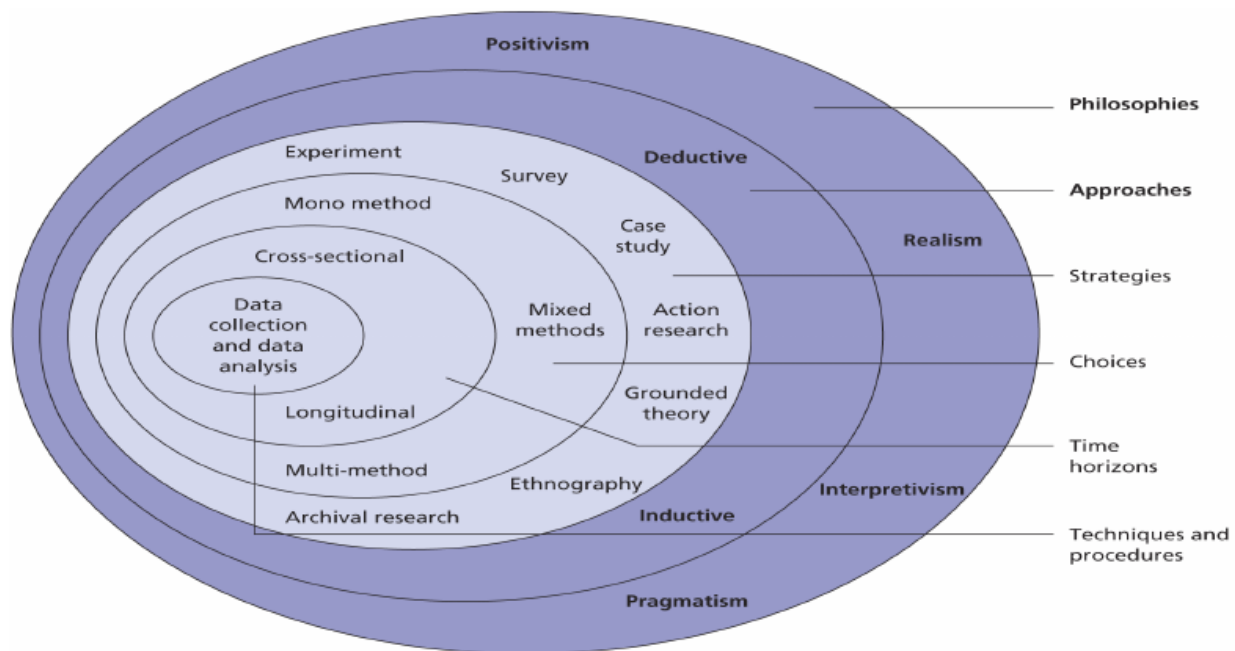


Figure 2: “The Research Onion” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill., 2005).

### 1.7.1 Theory of Science

This thesis examines the relationship between diversity movements and the women’s fashion industry, and its effect on consumer culture.

The underlying motivation for this thesis is to attempt to better understand what the consumer looks like, their perspective, and to provide steps that brands can take to embrace diversity movements affecting the women’s fashion industry. Research of consumers will be conducted through the lense of culture, identity, communities, brands, diversity, and social impact. Further research is conducted in regards to communication and marketing to allow for better understanding of actions and results within the industry. To then gain a more informed perspective of the scene, research was conducted on the fashion industry and diversity.

The selected theory of science is social constructivism, which will be expanded upon in the following section. This will consist of the relevance of this chosen scientific approach, the

applicable nature of the social constructivism method and its main assumptions. Then the suitable nature of social constructivism throughout this thesis will be explained.

The research that has been crafted and collected is then analyzed using a socially constructed interpretation meaning that it should be regarded in a manner assuming that diversity movements are affecting the women's fashion industry, which will assuredly influence the thesis process and results. Hence, it is important to note that the process and results are not purely objective.

### **1.7.2. Social Constructivism**

Social constructivists regard our understanding and perception of the world around us as a culturally created phenomena. This suggests that our view of the world is formed through human interaction. This could be through channels such as language and/or personal perceptions of surroundings which are affected by the culture in which an individual lives in, and which then goes on and shapes our world view (Jensen, W. T., 2011). When using the social constructivist perspective, reality is made available through an individual's knowledge and world view this implies that objectivity is a non-existent notion. Within social constructivism everything is created on the basis of human interaction, whether it be creating or enhancing it - everything is seen as a construct.

The aforementioned beauty ideal of a white, european, standardized look can be viewed from a social constructivist perspective. Using this viewpoint it would then be understood that from the long history of colonialism and western supremacy, that the beauty standard would reflect an idealized version of themselves. This coupled with their far and influential reach made this standard widely recognized worldwide (Donnella, L., 2019).

A different approach to carry out this study could have been with the use of biological reductionism. Using this approach would suggest that the ideal beauty standard would have been set by biologically-driven inclinations instead of being created by culture (Jensen, W. T., 2011). Thus, it could be argued that certain aesthetics in regards to the female body portray slimness because that could be attributed to health, well-cared for white teeth are connected with wealth and health, height is sought after for the same reasons, and symmetry is perceived as a sign of beauty, and possibly health, which can aid reproductive success. With the biological

reproductionist approach the goal of human beings would be biological optimization in order to achieve reproductive success, and creating the strongest offspring possible that would succeed, and this would be why this particular beauty standard is widely promoted, even within the women's fashion industry (Brigandt, I., & Love, A., 2017).

However, the biological reductionism standpoint leaves much unanswered and oversimplifies some matters. One important thing to note is how far the human race has come from its beginning wandering in small tribes through the savanna. The concept of communities has grown, become more complicated and changed irrevocably with globalization, increased awareness of diversity, and technological advancements. Not only that but societies push for models, on the runway and in advertisements in fashion, that are unhealthily thin which does not work from a biological standpoint (Better Health, ND). These points render the biological reductionist viewpoint unfit for this thesis. Instead, social constructivism manages to take into account the many nuances of human nature, the complexity of people and history, and the dynamic state of affairs, showing its ability to be adaptable and situational. Maslow's hierarchy of needs reflects the shift from fashion as necessity, falling into the tier of physiological and safety needs, and transcending to the more complex needs at the top of the pyramid (Can be found in **Appendix E**) (Armstrong, Gary, Kotler, Philip, & Opresnik, 2016). Social constructivism is therefore chosen as the theory of science for investigating how consumer culture shapes diversity movements in the women's fashion industry.

### **1.7.3. Research Philosophy - Ontology and Epistemology**

In the view of social constructivism, everything is a construct between humans and their individual selves, this means that nothing about their worldview is absolute. Rather, it makes the claim that since their ontological position is relativistic, meaning that there is no absolute truth or legitimacy, but rather it works with relative and subjective truths. It is important to note that the concept of a society is no longer viewed as purely existing in the minds of individuals but has evolved into a network of structure that then influences the individuals. One example of this is globalization and the impact it has on diversity and the way in which the women's fashion industry works (Kjørup, S. 2012). This thesis will take a relativistic approach in order to account for the changing nature and the human element of diversity movements and the women's fashion industry.

Through approaching this thesis from the view of a social constructivist, oftentimes the position is subjective and is composed through interactions that take place between the researchers and what is being researched. The focus in this thesis will be on the consumers, their perspective, and what brands can do in order to incorporate diversity movements effects on the women's fashion industry. Furthermore, the analysis is created upon the idea that things, concepts, people, etc. are all interrelated. The analysis for this thesis then focuses not on the isolated subject but instead seeks to investigate the relations among elements (Jensen, W. T. 2011). This notion is the fundamental perspective used in this thesis in the analysis of how diversity movements and the women's fashion industry come into play with or affect the consumer, their perspective, and a brands ability to adapt to this changing landscape.

#### **1.7.4. Research Approach - An Inductive Approach**

The inductive approach will be used throughout this thesis. The inductive approach starts with observations and then towards the end of the research process, general connections, theories or suggestions are proposed as a result of the observations made. The inductive researcher is free in altering the direction of the study, as research progresses if the initial hypotheses made is not correct. The approach aims to create meanings from the data set collected in order to identify any patterns there might be and from that build a theory. It is important to stress that the inductive researcher is also able to use existing theory to formulate the research question. The inductive approach is a method of learning from experience, that is observed in order to generate conclusions from the given subject investigated (David, T., 2003).

The research of diversity movements in the fashion industry and the role consumers are playing started as an observation. This observation was later investigated through thorough research of literature on the subject. The literature allowed for new insight on the subject that afterward created the basis on which our data collection was created, among these was a survey. The data collection is created in order to - at a later point - reach the inner layer of the Research Onion. The results of the survey were a determining factor in the choice of the theoretical framework in order to answer the problem statement created for this thesis. The inductive approach is considered the best possible approach to a thesis investigating changes in the industry and attempting to suggests how businesses can take advantage of the current movements.



### **1.7.5. Research Strategy**

The selection and application of the research strategy in a thesis affects the content and the aim of the particular thesis (Creswell, J. W. 2007). To answer the specific problem statement, different types of data has been collected using various methods.

### **1.7.6. Choices**

In the Research Onion, three overall methods are distinguished between when collecting data. The first method is the mono-method, referring to the use of only one research approach. The second is the mixed-method, which refers to a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection. The third method, the multi-method is characterized as being constituted by a wider selection of methods used (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill., 2005).

A collection of different kinds of research design has in this thesis been necessary to provide a proper overview of an industry in constant change and issue relevant materials for analysis of the problem statement. The chosen method for data collection is accordingly the mixed-method. Firstly, an investigation of the modern consumer in the women's fashion industry has been made from collected theories on consumer behaviour, consumer identity, brand communities and social identity theory. This has been done so through multiple publishings both more recent and older. The portrait is then considered in connection to the current landscape of diversity rising in the women's fashion industry. Secondly, a quantitative questionnaire has been created to obtain necessary knowledge and insight on the issue of diversity within our social networks (This can be found in **Appendix A**). The portrait created on consumers are thereafter held in comparison to the data provided from the questionnaire.

The choice of looking at the field of fashion, is a fitting choice due to the size of the industry, the visual nature of it, the fact that it is applicable to almost all people, and it's place in the everyday lives of consumers. Women's fashion is specifically very relevant due to the hyper-critical nature women have faced throughout history making them prime targets for an industry indicative of societal standards (Komar, M., 2016). Due to the enormity of the industry and the amount of variation within it, this thesis revolves largely around the effects and actions for high-street brands in the women's fashion industry. Identifying these focuses in the fashion industry

will allow for a more in-depth, targeted, and focused view of the issue while also alluding to broader concepts that are widely applicable throughout industries.

This thesis is mainly constructed from conducted research within younger consumers and the application of this research is primarily aimed towards younger participants of the fashion industry and the rising diversity movement in it. In the research on this topic provided by McKinsey and the Business of Fashion in the State of Fashion 2019 report, younger generations are found as more adaptable and leading a movement of change whether it be within social or environmental causes. The choice of the target group is consequently based on the notion that the industry is changing to a newer more inclusive fashion industry and that younger generations are the most suitable group of consumers to take this on as a new standard in the industry. However, since research for this thesis is conducted from and to the perspectives of a younger consumer, the suggestions created as a result of this has implications that extend far beyond the limits of a single target group or movement. The fashion industry is known for its trend-based way of life that are constantly shifting. In this thesis, diversity, as important as it is regarded, is considered another trend, that is currently the newest in the industry. This means, that whichever movement is currently the most recent, the research conducted from this thesis is nonetheless applicable. The constant need for adroitness in the business of fashion, or many other industries, is putting a burden on most businesses, which can be assisted in from the results and suggestions of this thesis, whether it is newer technology replacing social media as we know it today, or just another cause of action.

Regarding the selection of a research design, two categories of methods are distinguished between qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative methods aim to collect qualitative data which explain individual circumstances and provide detailed data. This method focuses on a limited amount of respondents to go in-depth with, through interaction and dialogue. This kind of data is often collected through interviews and field observations (Fischer, C. T, 2011).

The quantitative research methods aim to collect quantitative data, which is usually countable and statistical. The methods are descriptive and often useful when creating an overview of a specific problem. The quantitative method can be carried out through questionnaires or experiments. The quantitative method is often aimed towards making generalizations (Plonsky, L. & Gass, S. 2011).

### 1.7.6. Time Horizons

According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, the analysis can have two types of time horizons: the cross-sectional and the longitudinal (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill., 2005). The cross-sectional is created with a pre-set time established for the collection of data and provides insights into a field in the moment. The longitudinal time horizon refers to the collection of data over time.

This thesis focuses on the cross-sectional time horizon as the main focus is the current trend of diversity in the women's fashion industry.

### 1.7.7. Data Collection and Analysis

In the following section, the applied techniques and procedures will be accounted for. The utilization of the different techniques and procedures are vital to the functionality, understanding, and credibility of the thesis.

The application of a quantitative research design and research methods is consistent with the scientific approach applied in this thesis. The social constructivists consider elements such as interaction, communication, social context and language to be key elements in shaping an individual's' perception and knowledge and in specifically for this thesis, in regards to diversity. Consequently, the type of data collected in the thesis is both qualitative and quantitative, as we aim to understand the behaviours and opinions of the consumers in the women's fashion industry and how these consumer movements shape diversity in the industry. We wanted both to retrieve an overview and generalizations from the questionnaire as well as deep insight into specific behaviours and opinions from interviews.

Initially, an analysis based on secondary data describing the consumers will be conducted through a descriptive approach in treating the current landscape of the consumers in today's world. The concept of what this entails for the modern day consumer will then be constructed, to answer the first subsequent question: "*What is the current concept of consumer identity and how could that be affecting diversity?*". This approach requires a careful and systematic selection of data to be able to demonstrate validity (Research process steps, 2010). To build the "portrait of the modern day consumer" theoretical data was mindfully collected and analyzed to make an informed and astute concept. Understanding the modern day consumer

and the genesis of their existence, allows for further research to then be done into the consumers relation to the brand in the following subsequent questions.

For the analysis of subsequent question 2: "*In regards to diversity in the women's fashion industry, what are the consumer perspectives?*", a quantitative questionnaire concerning diversity and the opinions, habits, and behaviours of consumers in relations to it will be shared through our networks on the social media platform [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com). This questionnaire will be a vital instrument in obtaining knowledge about consumers and their viewpoints on diversity movements. Lastly, the questionnaire will serve as the primary data collected for this thesis.

Using a questionnaire ensures a natural and diverse result, contrary to interviews which would only be the response and opinions of a few people rather than a network. The questionnaire is shared on [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com), and has received 87 responses between the age of 20-60. This is done so using the snowball method (Research process steps, 2010). This method was applied to reach as many relevant consumers as possible. We are aware of when sharing the questionnaire through our own social media network, we are not able to reach a definitive broad audience, and that a main group of people between 20-30 is in the majority of the respondents. This can manipulate the results. However, by distributing the questionnaire through our social networks, we increased the likelihood of reaching a target group of consumers of high-street brands.

The final subsequent question 3: "*How can brands in the women's fashion industry embrace diversity?*", then delves into what the previous research means in regards to brands. A descriptive and theoretical approach will be taken into regards of this question much like the initial subsequent questions. This allows for an in-depth and dynamic understanding of the topic that then can then be used for analytical purposes. The theory looked at for this section revolved around communications, marketing, and the brand and consumer relationship in regards to the issue of diversity movements in the women's fashion industry. Through the analysis process, suggestions were then made and investigated using the SWOT model to outline strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in accordance to the actions suggested.

With the research conducted in the subsequent questions, the primary question will then be answered. The question being: *How does consumer culture shape diversity movement's in the women's fashion industry?*. Aligning with the approach taken in the subsequent questions

the primary question will be answered using a descriptive and theoretical approach concerning consumer culture, as well as relying on the previous research collected and conducted for the subsequent questions. The data that has been curated throughout the thesis will then be applied to understand consumer cultures effect on diversity movements in the women's fashion industry.

Through the inductive approach, the theories applied in this thesis will function to explain the current landscape of the women's fashion industry, the concept of diversity in it and general consumer culture in relation to this and marketing. The collected theories, date back from 1957 all the way to 2019, creating a more nuanced and informative understanding of the field of research relevant for this thesis. By building a well-rounded approach to the theory studies establish that the chosen theoretical method for analysis will be appropriately customized to ensure the best understanding of the findings to the primary and subsequent questions. In support of our results the chosen theories will be used in accordance with the industry, the primary question, and the subsequent questions. The use of the inductive approach ensures that the primary question of this thesis is the principal basis of the research.

Empirical data has been collected in order to answer the primary and subsequent questions while also presenting an assorted and encompassing analysis and discussion. The subsequent questions concerning what the modern day consumer looks like, current consumer perspectives, and actions that brands in the women's fashion industry can take to embrace diversity in this emerging landscape of consumer demand for corporate responsibility. The three subsequent questions, are the building blocks for creating a comprehensive answer to the primary question: *How does consumer demands shape diversity movements in the women's fashion industry?*.

#### **1.7.8. The ethics of the thesis**

This section determines that the thesis process was conducted in an ethical manner and this was taken into consideration throughout the process of the gathering and utilization of data.

The research conducted for this thesis includes primary research, thus research ethics were then applied throughout the entirety of the thesis process in order to guarantee that the founded results were treated as applicable and appropriate. The principle of the research ethics

consist of informed consent and anonymity. Informed consent meant that participants involved were provided with an understanding of the purpose and objectives of the research as well as enabling potential respondents to determine individually if they would choose to participate or not. For the purpose of anonymity, particular personal details were not collected in order to ensure the privacy of the participants.

# Chapter 2.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of chapter 2 is to outline the main theories on which the thesis is based. The theoretical framework is divided in two sections. One concerning consumers and one concerning business.

The specific areas of the theoretical framework are:

- 2.1. The fashion industry
- 2.2. Diversity
- 2.3. An intersectional Approach to Diversity Research
- 2.4. Consumer Culture Theory
- 2.5. Consumer Behaviour
- 2.6. Social Identity Theory
- 2.7. Social Impact Theory
- 2.8. Communication
- 2.9. Marketing
- 2.10. State of Fashion 2019: Year of Awakening

## 2.1. The Fashion Industry

Whilst the fashion industry is a large and global industry that is composed of many products, positions, consumers, and countless other components, it was not until sometime after the industrial revolution that it became recognized. In 1904, Georg Simmel began to try to define fashion and make sense of its place in society. He claims that:

*“fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change.”*  
(Simmel, G., 1957).

This definition touches upon the complicated relationship between fashion, fitting in, and standing out in terms of the individual. By mentioning the use of fashion to achieve “social equalization” it notes the ability fashion has to be used as a signal to the outside world what an individual associates themselves with. For example if a person chooses to wear a sports jersey this can be seen as signifying to other sports teams fans what group they are a part of. Another example, is the idea that particular band t-shirts coupled with other like-minded fashion aesthetics could mark you as part of an alternative culture and someone who chooses to wear expensive clothes maybe is either aligning themselves with, or at least attempting to, with the wealthier classes in society.

However, Simmel also mentions the “desire for individual differentiation”, creating a multidimensional and oxymoronic definition and purpose for fashion. Without this need for social differentiation there would be very little need for fashion. This could be seen through the widely recognized and authentic original punk fashion movement of the 1980’s, which strayed from societal norms by embracing ripped clothing, individualized and altered clothing, and an overall aesthetic that rejected being seen as the part of “normal” society (Redazione, D., 2017). Nevertheless, the fashion industry is still a profit-driven one, so even the once authentic and rebellious punk fashion and social movement turned into a high-street trend. Ripped jeans, decorated leather jackets, band t-shirts with holes, and other such items can be found in most high-street stores as a trendy item that can be bought by the masses. The capitalization on the punk aesthetic shows the relationship between consumer and companies. The people created the trend, the company noticed, the company played up the trend and created a need for it, and



then this idea was sold back to the masses. Simmel alleges that “fashion is merely a product of social demand” (Simmel, G., 1957). Many times the companies playing upon these trends are high-street fashion brands. High-street, used as an adjective, can be defined as:

*“(of retail goods) catering to the needs of the ordinary public.”*

(Oxford Dictionaries, ND).

These brands are normally affordable, available to the public, and over popular with the general population. Some brands that fall into this category are Hennes & Mauritz, Zara, and Asos. To understand the popularity and magnitude of such brands it is important to note Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) and Zara are among the ten largest fashion brands by sales value (Euromonitor, 2018). This demonstrates that this style of fashion consumption is largely habitual, meaning that shopping at such stores is simply the way of life for the common person. Another shared quality these brands have is the speed at which they create their product, and has resulted in a newer term being associated with these brands is “fast fashion”. Fast fashion indicates the rate at which the product is produced and thus implying the generic and standard nature of the clothing (Hansen, S., 2012).

With the advances made in technology, social media, online shopping and other forms of interaction the way consumers interact the fashion industry the relationship between company, consumers and trendsetters has been reshaped and has become even more complicated in this increasingly competitive and transparent modern day version of the fashion industry.

The fashion industry, much like most other industries, has been remarkably impacted by the societal shift towards the importance of social media in everyday life. There is a mediatization of the industry, which Agnes Rocamora describes as meaning,

*“looking at the ways fashion practices have adapted to, been transformed by, the media...focusing on...the ways people and institutions in the field of fashion have changed their practices for and with the media.”*

(Simmel, G., 1957).

This mediatization indicates that media has an affect on how the fashion industry works as well as why. This can be seen in the way that events and clothing are created for social media rather

than in-person viewing. An example of this was an event in 2013 when Burberry live streamed their fashion show across eleven social networks. The focus of the staging, looks, aesthetic, and branding becomes about what comes across on social media platforms for the likes of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. If Instagram is taken as an example, then due to its image-based content and the visual nature of fashion, then you can see that companies from high-street brands such as H&M who have 28.8 million followers to luxury brands like Dior who have 23.4 millions followers displaying strong social media presences. This is indicative of the way that consumers interact with fashion has changed. Dior is no longer an exclusive upper echelon brand, while they still portray that image, its media content is being consumed by the masses rather than the select few who would be handpicked to go to a runway show, access to the brand has been expanded.

Another sign of the changing industry due to media is the use of models. Some of the current top models in the industry who are the faces of campaigns, in shows, and associated with multiple brands are Cara Delevingne with 41.2 million followers, Kendall Jenner with 102 million followers, and Gigi Hadid with 45.7 million followers on Instagram. While causation is not always correlation, it can be argued that there is a link. Vogue stated as early as 2015 that “Brands openly monitor the followers and follow-through of a given social media star’s fan base, eschewing runway favorites in favor of the latest viral sensations” (Okwodu, J., 2015). This shows that not only has the fashion industry adopted digital media/social media and acknowledged it, but with this increase in social media there is an invitation for criticism because a fashion brand becomes more visible and available to every person and not just their target audience.

With the shift in the industry due to technological and societal changes it has become easier for companies within the fashion industry to market to their consumers. This means that big names no longer hold an edge purely because of their profit and ability to purchase ads in print or television. Social media platforms have low barriers to entry that allow companies to have the ability to advertise themselves in the same way as other companies.

Not only has there been a shift in the industry away from traditional marketing and big names but also a shift in inspiration-finding and sources. In the McKinsey/Business of Fashion report “The State of Fashion 2019” they reported that a 2017 millennial survey showed that consumers use external sources such as influencers, peers, tv, etc, rather than from a brand or

retailer directly. (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019) This industry has been forced to redesign its marketing style, to keep up with social media which has influenced how consumers think and work. The McKinsey/Business of Fashion report makes a clear statement on what those within the industry are going to have to be willing and able to do to stay relevant and thus stay in the industry, stating that:

*“regardless of size and segment, players now need to be nimble, think digital-first and achieve ever-faster speed to market. They need to take an active stance on social issues, satisfy consumer demands for ultra-transparency and sustainability, and, most importantly, have the courage to “self-disrupt” their own identity and the sources of their old success in order to realise these changes and win new generations of customers.”*

(McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019).

The idea of the large brand names is fading and in its place there is a push by consumers for “small brand with compelling and authentic narratives.” (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019). This new digital landscape alongside consumers wants is pushing traditional large brands in the industry to rethink and rebrand in order to be able to maintain their status.

Fashion has gone from being a closed, elite, and difficult-to-enter industry with high barriers to entry to one that is open to the masses to appear, work, influence, and participate in, in any way. Companies like H&M and Zara, which are in the top ten of largest fashion brands (Common Objectives., 2018), now find themselves having to take smaller companies into account. While the concept of individualisation appears in Simmel’s first introduction of the fashion industry to the world, the power of the individual has increased immensely due to social media and the internet. The rapid and behavior-changing nature of social media, means that the fashion industry is left reacting to social media influenced behavior more than they are influencing it. This reactive nature shows a shift of power from company to consumer. Consumer demand is now more important than ever in the fashion industry. While this is the state of the fashion industry at the moment, there is no saying when something else will be introduced to change the structure as we know it.

## 2.2. Diversity

*“People usually find comfort from being around others similar to themselves and seek support for their views of the world and their place in it.”*

(Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze., 2014).

The term diversity refers to the things that separates us from one another. Diversity is everywhere around us; in the small differences between two people from the same country, but different parts of it, or two people with the same educational background applying for the same job, but differentiated by their individual personalities, or even just the difference in hair color between brother and sister and on to the bigger differences between two people with different religious orientation, or the differences between wealthy and poor, or natives and immigrants. With the development of our globalized world, more and more people from different parts of the world, with different beliefs, upbringings, and views of the world are living side by side in an increasingly interconnected world, calling for a better understanding of diversity and what we can gain from it.

The discussion surrounding diversity is a not a new debate, but has deep roots in world history. Some of the biggest barriers in this still ongoing equality debate are prejudice and racism.

*“Prejudice and racism shape how we think about diversity and difference. When institutions of society, such as law and education, reinforce these beliefs, the result is self-perpetuating social hierarchy in which some groups have more, privileges and wealth for example, and other groups have less.”*

(Jones, Dovidio,& Vietze., 2014).

Diversity is a reality, and according to *The Psychology of Diversity - Beyond Prejudice and Racism* written by Jones, Dovidio & Vietze, benefits and challenges can be identified in relation to diversity. They argue that diversity offers a facilitation of adaptability, flexibility, and creativity in thinking and acting. Flexibility allows an individual, an institution, or a society to perceive others in non-stereotypical ways, as do adaptability and creativity. It is also argued that diversity produces better citizenship in a more diverse world, that we inevitably are engaging in. Diversity is also seen to foster human capital, by engaging the participation of marginalized

groups. The argument here is that “*a society is better and stronger when it promotes and encourages broad participation from all citizens*” (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze., 2014), a quote that in this thesis will be applied to the current state of the women’s fashion industry, by raising the question: *how can brands in the women’s fashion industry embrace diversity?*.

In spite of the many gains that come from embracing diversity it is also accompanied by challenges, that can make the whole concept of diversity seem less attractive to some. Diversity is automatically excluding the focus of non-minority groups (Jones, Dovidio,& Vietze., 2014), such as the caucasian heteronormative look that has been promoted within the field of fashion, in order to make room and focus on marginalized groups within that area. Diversity is also feared to set people further apart by focusing on the differences rather than similarities, as studies have shown, it can lead to people stereotyping differences more (Wolksko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink., 2000).

Individuals belong and identify themselves with many different groups, and even in these groups, not all members are alike, even though they share some similar beliefs or traits. This also applies to the members of diverse groups such as individuals within the same religious belief. Every individual is unique and belongs to multiple groups and communities, and this is why diversity is not, and cannot be, sufficiently covered by looking at racial, ethnic or cultural groups or communities as a whole (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze., 2014). However, one selection of vocabulary can be about describing diversity in terms of cognitive diversity or diversity limited to demography. However, in this thesis, diversity will be referred to, and captured at best, with the term “identity diversity” to represent the differences among people based on sex, gender, orientation, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, immigrant status and so on, and will be applied in this thesis as a term concerning all of these diversity traits.

The fashion industry has been representing the previously mentioned particular standard of beauty for the majority of the industries existence. However, during the last couple of years the push for inclusivity has resulted in an increase of diverse representation in the women’s fashion industry. This push for diversity can be seen on the runway, in adverts, on webpages, in the media, and in other marketing materials.

With the recent regard for inclusivity there has been a visible shift, towards diversity, in the women’s fashion industry. Suddenly brands are communicating to more types of women

than ever before. This communication is now aimed towards women of different body types, ethnicities, ages, with impairments, and any features that do not fit the standard for what the fashion industry defined as what a woman should look like. Not only is there diversity in a physical and visual sense, but also in what makes up a person's identity whether that be religious orientation, sexual orientation, gender, or anything that sets them apart from the caucasian, heteronormative, cisgendered narrative that has been written as the standard within the fashion industry.

Below we will define and elaborate the previously listed traits in terms of diversity:

Body type: By body type, the intended meaning is women outside the standards set by the industry, which are normally tall, skinny women. In a report created by Model Alliance in 2017, 241 fashion models were interviewed in terms of their health (Austin, Lowy, Rodgers, Yu, & Ziff., 2017). The report went to show that the mean Body Mass Index (BMI) of the interviewed models was 17.41, however studies have shown that a BMI under 18.5 is considered underweight and possibly malnourished (Better Health, ND). This shows a standard much below what a normal female should look like, in terms of health, so diversity in body type is not simply plus-sized, which is anything that is visually larger than the classic industry standard, so could even be just your average woman.

Ethnicity: In the fashion industry, there is notably more women that are caucasian or european looking. In 2016, the Council of Fashion Designers of America reported in their 2016 Runway Diversity Report, that less than 25% of the models used were people of color (Andrews, J., 2016). Given that the majority of models are caucasian, diversity in terms of ethnicity would look like a more comprehensive representation of models from different ethnic backgrounds.

Age: In terms of age and diversity, it is common to see women of a younger age rather than more mature in age. In the report by Model Alliance, the average age of those interviewed was 22.68 (Andrews, J., 2016). This shows the preference by brands for a more youthful appearance, so the inclusion of more women of different ages would be a step towards diversity and inclusion in this category.

Impairment: Typically models are able bodied women with no visual impairments. Diversity in regards to impairments means normalizing and acknowledging a community of people who

have been cast aside in the past. We can see diversity in Madeline Stuart who is the first model with a signed brand campaign that has down syndrome (Madelinestuart.com, ND), in Moscow in 2017 there was a runway show that consisted of wheelchair-using models (Stone, C., 2017), and in 2016 “The Blind Fashion Show” debuted at New York Fashion week (Theblindfashionshow.com, ND). So by impairment, the intended meaning is models who do not fit the able bodied standard and bringing attention to them. As well as the inclusion of a community of people who have previously been ignored by the women’s fashion industry.

Religious Orientation: A model’s personal religious affiliation has previously been considered irrelevant, in terms of their modeling, excluding hijab-wearing models. This has started to change and can be seen with the recent exposure of Halima Aden, who is the first hijab-wearing model to land a cover of Vogue (Pithers, E., 2018). Religious orientation is becoming a conversation that is finally being had in the fashion industry. So by religious orientation it means seeing visual signs of religions that have previously had less or no exposure in the fashion industry.

Sexual Orientation: In the modern day and age of social media, gossip magazines, and increased interest in celebrities, which some models are considered as, there is more of a spotlight on personal life. Due to this, a models sexual orientation is now part of the conversation at times. We can see the shift towards creating a safe space for the LGBTQ community with events such as the dapperq runway show in New York Fashion Week that was an explicitly LGBTQ event and celebrity models, such as Cara Delevingne, who is also sharing their own sexuality and creating a discussion around bisexuality (Glamour Magazine, 2017). Diversity in sexual orientation is considered anything that differs from heteronormativity.

Gender: In 2019, gender is no longer limited to the male or female preassigned designations that are based off of your sex at birth. Gender has taken a more inclusive, fluid, and individualized turn (Maoui, Z., 2018). This can be seen with the use of trans models such as Andreja Pejić (**Appendix B**), the use of male models in women's clothing fashion shows (Fury, A., 2016), and shows such as the Raf Simons Calvin Klein events that showed very little difference between what constitutes as male and female clothing (Trochu, E., 2017). Diversity through gender is any push back towards the notion of women's fashion being shown by models that only fit the CIS gendered ideal, and who the clothing is intended for.

With these terms of diversity, we can start to find representation of them in the women's fashion industry. There are many examples of what this looks like in today's world of women's fashion. **Appendix B** is filled with examples of inclusivity in the women's fashion industry from plus-size models and hijab-wearing women gracing the cover of vogue (Ashley Graham cover, Halima Aden - **Appendix B**), woman with amputated legs walking the runway (Lauren Wesser - **Appendix B**), transgender women modeling (Andreja Pejic - **Appendix B**), 60 year old's modelling swimsuits (Gilleen McLeod - **Appendix B**), and non-photoshopped underwear ads (aerie - **Appendix B**) as seen in **Appendix B**.

### **2.3. An intersectional Approach to Diversity Research**

Understanding diversity and being able to investigate how consumer culture shapes diversity movements in the women's fashion industry, a language and terms in order to discern the diversity movements has been acquired by the theory "*An Intersectional Approach to Diversity Research*" by Ahir Gopaldas and Glenna Deroy. The research explores the term diversity by two different approaches; the unidimensional approach and the intersectional approach. The unidimensional approach looks at diversity lineally by only a dimension at a time, however, the intersectional approach investigates diversity simultaneously across multiple dimensions.

The intersectional approach is used to describe the multiple dimensions of diversity, such as social identity including age, body type, race, sex, physical ability, and sexual orientation, on a hierarchical matrix. In opposition to the latter, the more traditional approach to diversity is the unidimensional approach which looks simultaneously at one dimension of diversity at a time (Gopaldas, A. & Deroy, G., 2015).

The approaches are applied to explain and investigate how consumer culture shapes diversity in the women's fashion industry. Diversity has long been understood from a unidimensional perspective, however with the escalating demand from consumers which will affect the future of diversity in the women's fashion industry, the intersectional approach will mainly be applied.

The research paper by Gopaldas and Deroy creates a terminology, that will be utilized in this thesis; the unidimensional and intersectional approaches allow us to interpret diversity in



the women's fashion industry by distinguishing the level of diversity applied in the fashion industry through media and runways. The unidimensional approach is representing a low level of diversity, as opposed to the intersectional approach that illustrates a higher, extensive level of diversity. These terms can be used to understand whether or not a specific ad is diverse enough, by trying to understand if a brand is only using a unidimensional approach, rather than an intersectional approach (Gopaldas, A. & Deroy, G., 2015).

## Consumers

### 2.4. Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) revolves around social and cultural ideas in relation to the marketplace rather than culture in sense of geographics, ethnicity, or other non-market related factors. In 2005, Arnould and Thompson made the claim:

*“consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relations between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources of which they depend are mediated through markets.”*

(Arnould, E. & Thompson, C., 2005).

This proposed shift in culture from a more traditional sense into a more fluid and diverse format proposes a shift from a singular type of culture such as, American culture or Japanese culture, to a more fragmented, varied, and constructed assimilation to create and define a culture for the consumer. People can shop in particular shops, listen to certain music, watch different tv shows, and choose to identify themselves by what they consume, whether it fall more into a particular type of culture or a vast multitude of different consumer cultures.

Consumer Culture Theory is a more in-depth and proactive look into the relationship between consumers and what they choose to consume. Arnould and Thompson characterize this advanced consumer behavior knowledge by stating that CCT accomplishes this by:

*“illuminating social cultural processes and structures related to*  
*1) consumer identity projects,*  
*2) marketplace cultures,*  
*3) the socio historic patterning of consumption, and*  
*4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer’s interpretive strategies.”*  
(Arnould, E. & Thompson, C., 2005).

Consumer Identity Projects indicates the consumers ability to build an individualized identity through the products they choose to purchase and represent themselves with. Marketplace cultures refer to a brands ability to build and sustain a culture indicative to their brand image that consumers can participate in and be identified by. The socio-historic patterning of consumption is the notion that social capital can influence consumption choices. Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer’s interpretive strategies is the idea that consumers are influenced further by consumption choices they have already made which could have further consumption effects or even influence ideological ideas (Arnould, E. & Thompson, C., 2005). These four perspectives within CCT allows for research from this theory to take multiple factors into account and create a more well-rounded analysis.

While Arnould and Thompson may have introduced the concept of Consumer Culture Theory there have been criticisms and thoughts expanding upon the originally proposed idea of CCT. One of these criticisms addressed by Soren Askegaard, is that there is a distinct lack of consideration for the market itself, and a misjudgement in consumer agency. He claims that CCT as a field of study is moving towards an *“increasing focus not just on the consumer as a market actor but on more complex institutional systems of market interaction as constitutive of consumer culture.”* (Askegaard, S., 2018). This draws attention to the power that brands can have on consumers, while noting that consumers have autonomy to make their own decisions it is important to recognize and acknowledge the power and affect the market can have on the consumer. This could come from advertising, a brands reputation, social campaigns, and other aspects that could influence a consumer. Combining the basis of Consumer Culture Theory from Arnould and Thompson’s initial definition of theory with Askegaard’s request for more insight into the market influence in combination with consumer action creates a more in-depth and informative method of analysis.

Another aspect of change to take into consideration in regards to Consumer Culture Theory is the concept of cultural hybridization. In 2018's Consumer Culture Theory conference one of the themes was cultural hybridization, implying that thanks to virtual media and other related developments, "we are witnessing a transnational imaginary and global cultural connectivity that has not been seen before – leading to transformations in cultural patterns and practices" (Holton, R., 2000). A large scale example of cultural hybridization is the United States of America which is commonly referred to as a cultural 'melting pot' reflecting the mix of multiple different cultures, and the emergence of new cultures from this mixture. This can be seen in the mix of languages, food, religion, race, and other cultural components that have defied borders and created a new understanding for people participating in how they view and interact with their world. It is also important to note that globalization, the presence of technology, and the popularity of media-sharing apps such as Instagram and Facebook are making the concept of consumer culture even less susceptible to the ideas of borders and open to more influences (Holton, R., 2000).

The women's fashion industry is built upon brands attempting to sell their products and image to consumers. With Consumer Culture Theory a deeper analysis and understanding of those consumers can be achieved, allowing for better understanding of how the consumer functions, what they want, and what messages they will react to.

## **2.5. Consumer Behaviour**

Within the field of consumer culture, it is important to take consumer behavior into account. Consumers are not mindless, manipulated beings but rather individuals that have agency and decision-making skills. As our society is consumption-driven, our way of relating to and expressing social identities are, in part, related to which products and services we consume. First and foremost, consumer behavior is identified as: "(...) the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires." (Solomon, M. R. 2015). When consuming specific products and services the symbolization of these is not coincidental; every purchase symbolizes a value of identity, that we as individuals would like to identify with. This indicates that our consumption expresses who we are to the external world (Solomon, M. R., 2015).

An individual's agency over identity can be expressed through what they choose to buy and be seen with. This cultivated identity through possessions is then viewed by others, thus creating a perceived public identity for the individual. Due to the fact that people "seek to express ourselves through possessions" (Belk, R., 1988), it is important not to underestimate the importance of what people own and what that says about them. Whether it be consciously or subconsciously there is a weight to what possessions, or in this case the fashion, that people decide to have and be seen with.

With the choice of a particular possession, it is then possible for a person to be seen as part of a brand community. A brand community is defined as:

*"A specialized, non-geographically bound, community, based on a structural set of social relationships among admirers of a brand."*

(Muniz, A. & O'Guinn, T., 2001).

This notion of brand community is a natural progression from the traditional sense of community. With the aid of technology, increased consumerism, and the growing global nature of today's societies, moving the traditional idea of a community into the sphere of possessions then recreates that tradition in a new way. On account of brand communities stemming from the traditional sense of community it makes it easier for consumers to embrace the idea that part of how they define themselves is by using brands. The way that people define themselves using products means that these brands come with a certain image, whether it be controlled by the brand or not. Consumers are aware of this and make decisions based on how they view themselves in relation to a brand and what it implies to others (Muniz, A. & O'Guinn, T., 2001).

This means that within the women's fashion industry brands need to be aware of the concept of brand communities, their own pre-existing brand community, and what their future goals are in regards to what they want to accomplish with their brand community. With the relocation from physical store fronts and people, to the digital realm which includes social media, brands have had to adapt these strategies to fit this new communication style.

*“Companies have advanced this dialogue by creating brand communities that intensify brand-customer relationships and grant customers the opportunity to bond with one another, eliciting a sense of belonging.”*

(Helal, G. & Ozuem, W., 2018).

Brands are engaging in communication between brand and customers, and then also have to take into consideration that customers are communicating with each other. Not only are brands facing an increase in the amount and complexity of communications but they also have to start thinking about the implications of their brand image.

Lee, Lee, and Wu define brand image as being “ the overall mental image that consumers have of a brand, and its uniqueness in comparison to the other brands.” (Lee, Lee, Wu, 2011). This definition allows the understanding that brand image is about an individual's knowledge and impression of the brand. Brand image can further be understood by examining Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer's interpretation that the notion of brand image can be divided into functional brand image and hedonic brand image (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer, 2012). A consumer's knowledge and impression about the more practical aspects of a brand is the focus of functional brand image. Hedonic brand image puts more focus on a consumer's emotions, attitude, and sentiment towards a brand. These two understandings of brand image delve into the nuances of consumer relationships with brands and the fact that they are not purely product-based. It is important to understand brand image because it does affect a company. One way it does this is that a positive brand image can help companies stand out from their competitors (Hsieh & Li., 2008). Not only can it help a brand stand out from the cluttered landscape of the women's fashion industry but an agreeable brand image can affect a consumer's decision to purchase from a brand (Stocchi, Driesener, & Nenycz-Thiel., 2015). This information goes to show that brand image has effects, should be taken into consideration, and plays a role in any industry, including the women's fashion industry.

## **2.6. Social Identity Theory**

Increasing interest is being taken in the concept of identity in many areas and debates, whether it be regarding national identity, ethnic identity, corporate identity, stolen identity, identity crisis, social identity or individual identity and many more. Our present idea of the concept

is a newer notion, that became popular since people had the wherewithal to question purpose and motivation (Fearon, J. D., 1999). Reflecting that defining oneself is becoming increasingly important.

The concept of identity in everyday lives is concerned with the question “what does it mean to be you?” or even “who are you?”. In psychology, identity is said to be related to our basic values, qualities, beliefs, personality, physical appearance, and expressions that constitute a person (Rex, J., & Mason, D., 1986). These choices and actions can be seen as a reflection of who we are and what we value. However, it is important to notice that these choices and actions may not reflect one’s authentic self. Identity is not a static concept and is never final since it can change throughout life, just as one may hold multiple identities. An example of this is seen in different social contexts (Heshmat, S., 2014), indicating that individuals are capable of picking out different aspects of their personality in order to react appropriately to the situation or group they come face-to-face with (Dovidio, Gaertner, Pearson, & Riek., 2005).

According to Giddens, identity is no longer a given, and we do not have a pre-existing identity based on just our gender, class, family, or locality. In our modern world, when it comes to identity, everything is up for questioning, forcing us to continually look for answers about our self and the world we live in. In continuation of this thought, identity becomes a task and something that we must do - for ourselves. We become reflective. Giddens calls this “the Narrative of Self” (Giddens, A., 1991).

The concept of the self becomes even more complex, as the concept of identity is ever so important in relation to groups and the outside world, and does not only concern an individual. Identity within a group and in relation to that groups context in the outside world is a newer phenomenon. The concept of this relationship is known as Social Identity Theory, which is:

*“For our purposes we shall understand social identity as that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership.”*

(Tajfel, H., 1974).

Social Identity Theory helps to explain the idea of the self and the connection of the self to the groups an individual finds themselves participating in. Everyday individuals participate in a myriad

of groups, some intentional and some unintentional. Social Identity Theory considers intergroup relations as a central point of interest.

Groups are communities of people that share a membership to a group whether it be interest, familial, religious, occupation, or many other basis of establishing a collective community where participants are considered as members. For the concept of groups to exist there might be an out-group, there is a sense of not belonging if you are not part of the group, there is a distinction on whether an individual is in or out (Capozza, D., & Brown, R., 2000). The parameters of being part of groups are different for each one and how it functions, for example it could be an online platform that allows anyone to participate in conversations about a particular sports team, or it could be the United States Senate which has high barriers of entry and a limited amount of space. Purchasing certain types of fashion products or from particular brands, can also be seen as taking part in a community or group. If an individual chooses to wear an article of clothing that has a sports logo then they are signifying to the world that they support a certain sports team. Even if they simply bought the product because off of aesthetics rather than any sports allegiance, it still sends a message out to the world and marks them as in a group or out of one if someone who views it has allegiances elsewhere. Due to the likelihood of an individual participating in a multitude of groups, the notion of intergroup behavior should also be taken into a consideration, intergroup referring to a way of describing something that occurs between two or more social groups.

With social media, individuals are defining themselves in terms of online groups. Some ways they can do this is by what platforms the choose to use, what they choose to share, who they choose to follow, and the options for these seem almost limitless.

*“By route of social media and subsequent online brand communities, current and aspirational customers are emboldened in voicing affiliation with a brand and consequently augmenting self-presentation.”*

(Helal, G., & Ozuem, W., 2018).

Consumers, in the women’s fashion industry, are using social media and online brand communities to personally define themselves and to signify this to others.

Social Identity Theory divides the self into two identities: personal and social. The personal self can be characterized by features that are uniquely personal and not related to any group membership. According to Capazza and Brown, it includes personality traits, physical characteristics, skills and abilities, personal experiences, and personal aspirations. Whereas social identity takes into consideration the group that an individual chooses to affiliate themselves with (Helal, G. & Ozuem, W., 2018). The convoluted relationship between a person's quest for individuality coupled with the desire for the sense of belonging that comes with being part of a community or a group, creates a desire for fulfilling both needs. According to Georg Simmel, fashion is a reflection of the notion of trying to appease both the personal needs and the needs of the group that an individual finds themselves a part of (Simmel, G., 1957). Social identity also considers whether a group is an in-group or an out-group. When an individual identifies with a group or community, it then becomes a factor in how they see and identify themselves.

Social media and online brand communities mean that consumers are participating in groups at a higher rate and are able find more specialized groups towards any interests they may have. This results in an increased complexity surrounding the notion of identity. The women's fashion industry, like most industries, is shifting towards a more online and digital presence, as are the consumers. Social Identity Theory allows those in the women's fashion industry to attempt to understand the way consumers behave with groups, and hopefully become one of the groups they interact with.

## **2.7. Social Impact Theory**

Social Impact Theory offers an explanation on how social impact causes changes in consumer behaviour, attitudes and the belief of individuals. Social Impact Theory is an extension of Social Identity Theory. When an individual changes behaviour based on pressure applied from surroundings, either from an ingroup or outgroup, it is referred to as social impact. This can be due to some sort of social force, which can be generated by persuasion, threats, humour and embarrassment from an influencer (Azemi, Y. & Ozuem, W., 2018).



Bibb Latane has defined Social Impact Theory as:

*“Any of the great variety of changes in physiological states and subjective feelings, motives and emotions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behaviour, that occur in an individual, human or animal, as a result of the real, implied or imagined presence or actions of other individuals.”*  
(Latane, B., 1981).

However, Social Impact Theory is criticized for treating individuals as passive, as it argues that *“any person is capable of doing anything with the right amount of social force”* (Azemi, Y. & Ozuem, W., 2018).

Concerning the women’s fashion industry and the influence Social Impact Theory has, it initially affects the consumer. It accomplishes this by pointing out that consumers can be somewhat susceptible to societal pressures, so based on trends, communities, and other external factors it is another aspect that brands need to take into account when making assumptions about their customers. This can be seen in regards to the way there has been a push for diversity and inclusivity by consumers that brands need to respond to (Featherstone, M., 2007).

## **2.8. Communication**

The act of communication has undergone a vast development, especially with the rise of the internet and social media, which has drastically changed interaction and communication. Social media has become an influential communication channel, where businesses can communicate brand identity, foster relationships, and interact with consumers. One of the biggest changes that communication through social media has brought with it is the number of people that can be interacted with (Wolny, J. & Mueller, C., 2013).

Today, brand communication can entail a mixed use of traditional media channels and more modern channels such as combining newspapers, television and social media platforms. The act of communication by a brand is intended to deliver a meaningful and focused message that communicates the brand identity. These different communication activities influence the customers' opinion of the brand and its products. Today, the life of a brand is being increasingly played out in online markets, where it seeks to unfold its potential. Social networking sites are

being used by consumers to connect with one another, and increasingly to connect consumers with brands and vice versa (Finne, Å. & Gronroos, C., 2017).

### **2.8.1. Online Communication**

Online communication brings with it countless opportunities for brands, however, it also comes with rising complexity for communication. Herskovitz and Crystal argue, that the brand must create an online presence in alignment with the identity of the brand and this identity must be communicated as brand persona with human attributes. This is so the brand seems authentic to its users (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

Communication can close the distance between the company, its customers, and other stakeholders. Communication is seen by Duncan and Moriarty as the human activity that links people together and creates relationships (Duncan, T., & Moriarty, S.E., 1998). Communication is creating meaning, and it can develop, organize, and disseminate knowledge. Due to being a tool for creating meaning and organizing functions, communication plays a crucial role in building relationships. Communication becomes a useful tool for brands with an interest in being more customer-focused and in building relations. With communication comes responsibility, as communication not only entails the conscious decisions a company makes on what to communicate, but also everything communication-minded created by others surrounding the brand. This, whether it be intentionally or unintentionally, can have massive implications on brand perception (Duncan, T. & Moriarty, S.E., 1998).

### **2.8.2. Word-of-Mouth Communication**

One important communication tool that is relevant in the women's fashion industry is word-of-mouth (WOM) communication which has a long history of relevance and has adapted to modern times to remain relevant. Traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) is defined by Johan Arndt as:

*“oral, person-to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service.”*

*(Arndt, J., 1967)*

This definition holds three valuable components to unpack in order to understand how to differentiate WOM from other forms of communication or marketing. Firstly, it is based around interpersonal communication, so it is not brand to consumer, or brand to brand, but simply between two people. This shows that while brands can influence what conversation is being had with what they produce or share, the dialogue is ultimately out of their control. The conversation could be positive or negative, public or private, or a number of other styles that could impact brand image. Next is the fact that the conversation taking place is surrounding a brand, product, or service so it is a commercially-focused conversation. While it is commercially-focused it is not commercially-minded, because the communicator is perceived as non-commercial. Meaning that the communicators motivation is not, or at least is not recognized, as commercially-focused. However, in the face of technological advancements some adjustments have had to been made around what constitutes as WOM communication.

### **2.8.3. Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication**

With the rise of internet culture and its effect on the way people communicate it is then important to look at its affect on word-of-mouth communication, it is referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). While there are many ways to define eWOM, the most descriptive that takes most factors into account is by Elvira Ismagilova, Yogesh K. Dwivedi, Emma Slade, and Michael D. Williams stating that:

*“eWOM is the dynamic and ongoing information exchange process between potential, actual, or former consumers regarding a product, service, brand, or company, which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.”*

(Ismagilova, E., Dwivedi Y., Slade, E., & Williams, M., 2017).

This definition takes on the three previously discussed aspects from traditional WOM, concerning interpersonal communication, commercial focus, but not perceived commercial intent, as it is referred to as information exchange. In addition to those components it mentions the broad vast audience that the internet provides as a form of communication, as well as the dynamic and static nature this brings to this form of communication. Communication online can happen spontaneously and spread rapidly, meaning that if a brand does have to react they have less time to do so before it spreads beyond their control. This means that communication from the perspective of a brand has to be swift, have contingency plans, and be forward thinking in

order to combat the effect that eWOM can have on a brand image. The concept of WOM and eWOM in regards to marketing will be further discussed and evaluated in the marketing section.

In today's media landscape *sharing* has become a popular way of communicating. By sharing photos, opinions, reviews and much more, users are now communicating faster and more effectively than ever. This creates a dynamic and fast-paced environment, making it crucial for brands to stay aware of the perception of the brand, which can change in an instant.

The study by Duncan and Moriarty finds that when it comes to communication there should be less focus on functionalism and production and more on relationships and meanings (Duncan, T. & Moriarty, S.E., 1998). This is making companies realize that one of their most valuable assets is relationships with customers and their perception of the brand.

#### **2.8.4. Visual Rhetoric**

An important part of communication that needs to be taken into account is intent, which can be further analyzed through rhetoric. Aristotle defines rhetoric as "The mental faculty (...) to see the available means of persuasion" (Gross, A.G., Walzer, A.E., 2008). This is applicable to brand messages which are persuasive, however the images they put out ranging from runway models to Instagram posts, and other forms are considered visual forms of communication.

Visual rhetoric is the acknowledgment that visual images can convey meaning and communicate, or assist in communicating, ideas and views. Some rhetorical scholars theorize that rhetoric is constitutive rather than instrumental and if language does in fact have that power then this language could shape a viewer's self image and how they relate to the brand. Burkes argues that language is symbolic in the sense that it "helps create the world" and in the contemporary era we have begun to look at rhetoric in the sense that it produces us, rather than merely being produced by us. In the women's fashion industry this notion plays into the complex and dynamic power exchange between consumer and brand (Stob, P., 2008).

While language conveys a message, visual rhetoric is also a large part of brand image. Not only does visual rhetoric come into play but the notion of "body rhetoric" is undeniably applicable since the women's fashion industry focuses on clothing the body. Body rhetoric, as defined by Fritch, Ice, and Palczewski is "rhetoric that foregrounds the body as part of the

symbolic act” (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). An example of visual rhetoric that uses body rhetoric in the women’s fashion industry can be seen through the Aerie Real campaign. This campaign consists of the promise to include “real” looking women, and to leave bodies in the underwear campaign untouched by photoshop, examples can be seen in [Appendix C](#). The image itself features nineteen different bodies types, all clad only in underwear. They cover a range of different sizes, ethnicities, body types, styles, and are easily differentiated between which is not common in the fashion industry. Alongside the diversity of the women featured they are also posed more naturally and do not come off as sexualized, pushing the message that customers are buying underwear for themselves and not for how it will look for others. There are women with natural hair, colored hair, updos, and other hairstyles which is a subtle assistance to resisting the sexualization and homogenization of women. Homogenization is the process of making things uniform or similar, and is a common tool to push particular beauty ideals and reject others. Aerie, an American underwear brand, has rejected this concept and shows a variation of ordinary women, not supermodels, that show a version of women that their customers can relate to. They also use spatial organization to promote equality by giving, it seems, equal space to each model and refusing to idealize just one of the many that they use. The images also show the expressive content of the ad with each model being joyful, prideful, and confident-looking. Aerie is said to appeal strongly to a customer’s pathos, creating an emotional relation with the brand, since customers not only just see underwear but they now associate the brand with positive body ideals and female empowerment. This use of social media and advertisements helped ensure that their customers received the intended message (Belk, G.E., Belk, M.A., 2008). Aerie is one example of a brand using rhetoric in a seemingly socially responsible way.

However it is not as simple as creating a positive ad. In the book titled “Defining Visual Rhetorics”, Dickinson and Maugh, claim that “Visual rhetoric in the built environment seldom works alone.” (Hill, C.A. & Helmers, M., 2012). This begs the question of would an ad such as this one have been as widely accepted ten years ago when the world was not currently focused on social inclusivity movements. Again this references the complicated power dynamic between consumer and brand. Dickinson and Maugh also bring up the issue of the effect of visual representation in media by facing the struggle of the “problem of locating oneself” in today’s modern day and age (Hill, C.A. & Helmers, M., 2012). The global inclusivity movements are starting to address this issue, and brands are starting to listen. They are now learning how to

communicate to who their consumers actually are, rather than the fashion beauty ideal of what they should look like, for fear of becoming obsolete.

Communication has always played a crucial role in attracting and keeping customers, the new digital landscape creates even bigger complexity in this task, but also means new benefits of understanding and applying communication theory, in order to create effective relationships resulting in more brand value (Duncan T. & Moriarty, S. E., 1998).

## **2.9. Marketing**

Marketing is not a new or revolutionary concept, but with technological advances, societal and global shifts, and a myriad of other changes that could not be predicted, it has led to it becoming a multifaceted field. The concept of marketing can be defined as “engaging customers and managing profitable customer relationships.” (Armstrong, Cotler, & Opresnik., 2017). Due to all of the changes marketing has shifted from a traditional and more static format to a field that has a toolbox of different types of marketing strategies that a business can pick and choose from to create a marketing strategy fit for their brand and industry.

### **2.9.1. Traditional Marketing**

Traditional marketing was mainly limited by marketing sources. It was done mainly through print, broadcast, direct mail, and telephone marketing. While these marketing styles are still alive and working today when considering the aforementioned changes in technology and society it is clear why marketing has become a more dynamic and complicated endeavor.

### **2.9.2. Digital Marketing**

Digital marketing stems from the introduction of technology and the internet, which has changed the way marketing acts, is produced, and how customers and brands interact. Digital marketing can be defined as “achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies.” (Chaffey & Chadwick., 2012). As opposed to the passive communication style between brand and consumer that takes place in traditional marketing, digital marketing creates a form of dynamic, two-way communication that did not exist before. The consumer now has a way to respond to and interact with the brand which was not as easy of an option before. The

internet is now a tool that is necessary for a company to be able to reinforce brand presence, break into new territories, interest consumers to a greater extent, and show their worth (Okonkwo, U., 2010). In terms of marketing it is no longer a question of whether or not internet technology should be integrated as part of their marketing strategy but, more so, a matter of how it may be most effectively used to a company's advantage (Porter, M., 2001). However, this two-way connection between brand and consumer means that they also made themselves more vulnerable to criticism that could be made very public and effect their public image. The internet is a platform that creates an easier space for people to express negative sentiments on, it is effortless yet impactful, and can be done by anyone from anywhere (Azemi, Y. & Ozuem, W., 2018). Another concern that comes from this is also the simplicity and ease at which a customer can switch to another retailer in the digital world. Digital marketing is the result of technological and societal changes that created new platforms, ways of communicating, and issues for marketers to deal with. Within that digital realm, Social Media is a pillar, which has become another style of complex marketing that marketers are trying to keep up with.

### **2.9.3. Social Media Marketing**

Social Media has swiftly and impactfully become a part of everyday life for many individuals, all over the world. Over 3 billion people worldwide are social media users (Chaffey, D., 2019) and 90% of marketers say that using social media marketing has increased exposure for their brand (Lincoln, J.E., 2019). These statistics go to show that there is a broad audience/market that can be reached through social media. Not only does social media have the ability to reach the masses it has the ability to do so with very little effort on behalf of the company. Now whether it is the right message, on the right platform, at the right time, to the right crowd is a large part of figuring out how to use social media marketing to the greatest extent for what you are trying to accomplish as a brand. However, if done correctly social media can be a powerful marketing tool, such as using Instagram, where 60% of its users say they learn about new products on the platform (Gotter, A., 2018). There is an increase in influencing brand communications and brand-building through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube by using these platforms for advertising and promotional campaigns (Azemi, Y. & Ozuem, W., 2018). Social media marketing activities also allow for brands and companies to gain powerful insight into consumer perceptions (Kucukusta, Law, Besbes, & Legohere, 2015). The two-way style of communication previously mentioned in digital marketing is still very much prevalent in social media and that is what creates that consumer

insight. This shows the importance of social media marketing as a tool that can not only influence a consumer, but help to understand the consumer as well. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that digital media, and thus, social media marketing is a two-way street.

Social media also allows for the creation of user-generated content (UGC) which in turn does take some brand image control away from the brands and places it into the hands of the consumers.

*“The fashion industry has also carried out extensive research into the impact of UGC on product sales, and these studies have indicated that UGC in the form of blogs, Instagram posts and various other social sharing platforms have had an effect on the purchase intentions of consumers. However, the quality of the content must be of a high standard in order for action to be taken.”*

*(Azemi, Y. & Ozuem, W., 2018).*

What this means is that brands are now receiving both positive and negative user-generated content. This new influx of opinions is something that is now part of marketing for brands and also a part of the consumer experience. This increase in social media usage coupled with the type of relationship-building communication style between brand and consumer has shifted how brands are seen as an aspect of identity.

*“Social media has matured into the prime channel for regular interactions and the development of brand-customer relationships that enrich social identity.”*

*(Azemi, Y. & Ozemi, W., 2018).*

The convoluted relationship between social media, brands, and consumer is always evolving as society, trends, and platforms continue to change. New social media platforms could mean new ways to interact with customers, but until they are created marketers will not know. Social media marketing can be a powerful tool to create a relationship between brand and consumer if understood and used correctly.



#### **2.9.4. Electronic Word-of-Mouth**

Within the emerging world of social media and review sections, a common communication thread is electronic word-of-mouth. Paying attention to the previously stated definition of this term, is important to take the audience, intent, and medium into consideration. With the internet's involvement these interpersonal conversations surrounding products can take place at anytime and have extensive reach.

Taking eWOM into consideration as a marketing tool is important because it will exist with or without brand involvement, and has an effect. For example, Sandes and Urdan, found that when individuals are exposed to consumer comments online that it can affect their image of the brand (Sandes, F.S. & Urdan, A.T., 2013). This implies that brands should no longer be satisfied to let the conversation surrounding them go about unchecked. To protect brand image they should be aware of what is being said, by who, and to whom. This way they can manage it in terms of being aware of what their image is in the eye of the consumer and then evaluating if they should attempt to shift it in any which direction.

Not only is the power of the brand image shifting into the hands of the consumers but the spread of whatever information they choose to share is far reaching. According to a study done by the US Office of Consumer Affairs, they concluded that a discontented individual will tell approximately nine others, while a content individual will only share their experience with around five people (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999). This shift in power from the brand to the consumer, can positively or negatively impact a brand based off of what type of conversation is taking place.

The connotation that individuals have regarding brand image, which can be influenced by eWOM, has real world results. In a 2013 study done by Hsu, consumers' intention to buy in regards to blogger recommendations in Taiwan was researched. Using data from 237 blog user they found that the blogger as an informant for the consumer positively affects their purchase intention (Hsu, Lin, & Chiang, 2013). Signifying to brands that consumers are listening to other consumers and that eWOM can have tangible consequences. There is a cyclicity to the nature of eWOM, because eWOM leads to product sales, which then goes on to produce eWOM, which once again leads to more product sales, and the cycle continues (Ismagilova, Dwivedi, Slade, Williams, 2017). In the women's fashion industry and the modern, global, social climate

that is pushing for inclusivity, brands have to be hyper-aware of the conversations taking place about and around them to ensure that they can maintain their brand image, reputation, and not become negatively effected or lost in the clutter of the internet.

#### **2.9.5. Brand Community for Marketing Purposes**

Communication is also taking place within the communities of a brand. Within a brand community there is collective value-creation which can benefit the brand (Schau, Muniz Jr., & Arnould, 2009). The concept of a brand community in these dynamic times of indifference towards brand loyalty is argued to be able to help strengthen brand image and enforce the idea of trying or staying with a particular brands products. According to Schau, Muniz, and Arnould, brand communities can be marketing tools if understood. In their research article, they introduce the idea of practices, that create a stronger brand community, to be done by consumers within the community. Practices can fall into four categories that can be summed up as:

- *“Social Networking (...) are those that focus on creating, enhancing, and sustaining ties among brand community members”*
- *“Impression Management (...) are those that have an external, outward focus on creating favorable impressions of the brand, brand enthusiasts, and brand community in the social universe beyond the brand community.”*
- *“Community Engagement (...) reinforce members’ escalating engagement with the brand community”*
- *“Brand Use (...) are specifically related to improved or enhanced use of the focal brand. These include (1) grooming, (2) customizing, and (3) commoditizing”*

(Schau, Muniz Jr., & Arnould, 2009).

These four categories outline for marketers a clearer picture on what sort of goal different marketing activities need to accomplish in order to serve the brand community. The women's fashion industry is susceptible to the effects that the concept of brand communities can have and thus implementing practices that interact with the different categories should be taken into consideration when attempting to understand consumers and what they want.

### **2.9.6. Social Marketing**

Another form of marketing that is relevant for some in the women's fashion industry is the concept of social marketing. Winthrop Morgan, with the endorsement of the International Social Marketing Association, defines it as:

*"Social Marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good. Social Marketing practice is guided by ethical principles."*  
(Morgan W., 2017).

With this definition of social marketing it is important to note the requirement of the intent of improving the current state of a community or cause through marketing efforts. With the involvement of intent it indicates that there is a need for a proactive nature with any marketing efforts. According to Dibb and Carrigan social marketing is ultimately about changing behaviour in order to ensure change for the betterment of society (Dibb, S., & Carrigan, M., 2013).

### **2.10. The State of Fashion 2019: A Year of Awakening**

Each year, McKinsey creates a report that explores the industry as a whole. The report investigates areas such as emerging trends, threats and challenges and strengths and opportunities for the industry. For 2019, McKinsey has created the report in partnership with 'The Business of Fashion' (BoF); a website delivering "fashion business intelligence on emerging designers, disruptive technologies and global brands that are making their mark on the industry at a time of unprecedented change" (Bof.com, ND.). The report created in cooperation of McKinsey and BoF accounts for the largest and most authoritative overview of the industry (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019).

In 2019, the fashion industry is characterized in the following terms: changing, digital and fast. McKinsey is suspecting a growth of 4 to 5 percent since 2018. However, the top 20 companies of the industry still account for 97 percent of the economic profit, while publicly-traded companies struggle to create economic value.

The report shows that many challenges still lie ahead of the fashion industry: volatility, uncertainty, and shifts in the global economy are still found to be driving fear. Globally, trade wars between the US and China and the uncertainty of how Brexit will play out.

The McKinsey report finds that social media continually is an increasingly important tool that is helping the smaller players grow. It is articulated that speed-to-market and responsiveness are critical success factors in the fashion industry in 2019.

*“(fashion players ...) need to take an active stance on social issues, satisfy consumer demands for ultra-transparency and sustainability, and, most importantly, have the courage to “self-disrupt” their own identity and the sources of their old success in order to realise these changes and win new generations of customers.”*  
(McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019).

McKinsey is predicting in The State of Fashion 2019, that the year will be shaped by consumer demands and needs. An example of this is that the word “feminist” appeared 6.3 times more on retailers homepages and newsletters in 2018 than it did in 2016. The report draws a picture of a consumer that is increasingly demanding on multiple levels. Consumers are increasingly becoming indifferent with owning possessions, creating an appetite for new ownership models. Among the many consumers shifts, it is also found that consumers are increasingly finding their inspiration from external forces such as influencers, friends, and online rather than directly from the brand, giving consumers and communities more power. The 2019 consumer is also described to be concerned with social and environmental causes, making them favor brands that are aligned with their beliefs and avoiding those that are not. This type of new consumer gains more power over brands, the report suggests, meaning that brands have to respond to this shifting consumer in order to stay relevant. This consumer expects full transparency across the value chain. It is argued that “the prizes for those who can adapt may be greater than ever — but so are the penalties for those who fail.” (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019).

McKinsey has created a global index to track the industry’s performance through three key variables: sales, operating profit, and economic profit which jointly provides a holistic benchmark. It is called The McKinsey Global Fashion Index (MGFI) and it is composed of over 500 public and private companies spanning all geographies, segments and product categories.

Specifically the index includes clothing, footwear, athletic wear, bags and luggage, watches and jewellery and other accessories. The index tracks and forecasts sales and operating profit (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019).

The massive amount of research done for the State of Fashion Report provides crucial insight into an industry, like many other industries, undergoing a fast-paced development.

## Chapter 3.

### ANALYSIS

Having defined the problem field of the thesis and outlined the theoretical framework, the focal point will now shift to the theoretical and empirical analysis, which consists of four sections representing the questions of investigation proposed in the problem statement of this thesis. The initial three sections each represent a subsequent question, in order to finally being able to investigate and analyse the main question proposed in the problem statement.

Chapter 3 will consist of:

- 3.1. The Current Concept of Consumer Identity
- 3.2. Consumer Perspectives on Diversity in the Women's Fashion Industry
- 3.3. Embracing Diversity
- 3.4. A Discussion of "How Consumer Culture Shape Diversity Movements in the Women's Fashion Industry?"

### 3.1. The Current Concept of Consumer Identity

The initial section of the analysis will explore the first question of the problem statement: *What is the current concept of consumer identity and how could that be affecting diversity?*. The concept of consumer identity will be considered from the different perspectives of the theories proposed in this thesis on Consumer Culture Theory including Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Identity, Social Identity Theory, and Brand Communities. Brand communities will further be explored for functionality purposes as marketing tool for brands. The analysis of these theories will be utilized in creating a portrait of the modern day consumer and, finally, to bring in the current concept of diversity.

#### 3.1.1. A New Consumer

It is important to try and understand what the consumers of a brand looks like, however; in this rapidly shifting and evolving day and age this becomes more difficult and further susceptible to change. This evolution significantly affected the concept of consumer identity, by altering the dynamics of identity-creation. Thus, affecting their relationships with the market, their communication style with other consumers and brands, and how and what the consumer chooses to identify with (Black, I., & Veloutsou, C., 2017). In connection to this, diversity in relation to consumers plays an important role in understanding similarities, differences, and relationships that they may have. Diversity refers to that which individuals determine as differing from what they take into consideration as concerning themselves.

When trying to understand the consumer, it is important to understand consumer culture, to fully understand the realm that consumer identity works within. Consumer Culture Theory offers a scope to discern how consumer identity functions in relation to social and cultural ideas that pertain to the marketplace. This perspective on what defines culture allows for the shift from geographical borders to a culture defined by the marketplace. This new definition means that consumers are defining themselves in new ways. Since consumer culture is a theory based around society and the market, it is dynamic due to the constant change that these two aspects face. This incessant evolution implies that consumer culture is a general theory that needs to be adapted and appropriately applied while taking into consideration modern day factors.

In accordance with the critique on Consumer Culture Theory proposed by Søren Askegaard, the market still retains a large amount of influence on the consumer, if done correctly. While consumer culture encourages the idea that consumers retain agency over their decisions regarding what they are going to be a consumer of, it also considers that consumers are still susceptible to influence. Due to the changing dynamics between market and consumers, coupled with the changing market landscape there is a latent conversation being had between consumers and the market. This results in a constant exchange of power, meaning that while marketers have the ability to influence consumers, those same consumers have the ability to communicate what they will and will not respond to. In the 2019 State of Fashion Report by McKinsey, it was found that the number one critical factor for brands to consider was responsiveness to consumer needs (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019). A result of this enhanced two-way communication format, it has become a necessity to listen to and acknowledge the consumer for fear of gaining a negative reputation, getting left behind, or becoming irrelevant. This relationship results in a fundamental constant back and forth between consumers and the market.

It is important to acknowledge the shift from culture being an easily defined and clear concept to a more borderless idea due to globalization, technology, and the way people communicate with these new technologies. This separation from geographical boundaries to a seemingly borderless way of defining cultures is affecting the way social dynamics work. Through the internet, social media platforms, popular culture, and other widely consumed commodities shared meaning can be found by consumers, who could be anyone from anywhere. This leads to an increase in social relations globally, which individuals can then participate in. Globalization is creating a basis of shared meanings and knowledge that people identify with individually and collectively.

Subsequently, this has led to the notion of Holton's cultural hybridization, which indicates the shift into a more diverse, progressive method of recognizing cultural pattern processes. An individual's creation of their identity within a world that functions in this way, means that they can start to piece together who they are. Identity is built up of a slew of different aspects, whether they be personal, familial, religious, interests, or based on anything else. With the ease of communication due to technological advancements, it has become much easier for individuals to piece together their identities due to the ease at which they can find like-minded communities. This has led to a communication style that is enabling consumers to identify



groups or communities that allows them to build their identity based off of their own personal nuanced identity. Not only has creating that identity become easier but conveying it to the world has as well.

Social media is a large contributor to this because individuals can define themselves to the outside world rather than solely relying on someone's perception and interpretation of what they are displaying. In the women's fashion industry, consumers are using social media and online brand communities in order to define themselves and convey to others their own personal, complex, and multifaceted personalities. With this recently acknowledged complexity of consumer identity the idea of stereotyping has become outdated and ignorant. Diversity directly combats this type of thinking and marketing. This intolerance for oversimplifying individuals has forced brands to be receptive to consumer demands, create space, and listen to consumers. This creation of space to listen to and hear consumers in, means that there is finally room for the many different types of individuals that there actually are in the world. Coupled with the previously mentioned shift in communication style this demand can no longer be ignored, and the push for inclusivity is starting to shift from consumer demand into brand action. As Jones, Dovidio and Vietze argued, diversity, if embraced, results in a new found flexibility that comes along with it (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze., 2014). Flexibility in the sense that previous stereotypes and ideas are pushed aside to allow for a new way of thinking and interpreting individuals, institutions, and societies without preconceived biases. This promotes an environment that is more comprehensive, allows for knowledge-sharing, and open for people to participate in, facilitating a broader arena of knowledge. Within this, there are broad shared meanings as well as room for highly individualized ideas. One way broad shared meaning can be seen is in the widespread knowledge of Coca-Cola, a highly recognizable brand that has been able to saturate the global market to create a shared perspective of its product and brand image (Levitt, T., 1993). This ability to create such a recognizable brand shows the connectivity that has been created by the previously mentioned societal shifts. While Coca-Cola is an extraordinary example of being able to utilize this connectivity, within the women's fashion industry this opens up possibilities for all brands to create a broader shared meaning.

### **3.1.2. Brand Communities**

In the following, brand communities will be explored, as well as their use as an initiative for brands, their relevance, and it's possible strengths and weaknesses in the growing demand

for inclusivity. The result of being able to create a broader shared meaning is the ability to create a brand community. Brand communities are no longer geographically limited and are established by a group of like-minded consumers who participate in this specialized community (Muniz, A. & O'Guinn, T., 2001). The participants in a brand community can consist of those who choose to purchase from the brand, or those who wish to consume or participate in the brand community only. The participant who choose to consume or participate could be by following the brand's social media, engaging in discussion about or with the brand, or even choosing to identify with the brand image. These are a few ways people interact within brand communities.

However, it is not lost on consumers that the possessions they own can define them. Consumer autonomy means that they have the ability to build their identity through these possessions. They can do this through buying specific brands such as choosing to define themselves as alternative to the norm by purchasing Dr. Martens, a brand that has built its image on being different from the popular standard. However, it is important to note the capacity a consumer has to construct their identity and the likelihood of that identity being simple and easily defined is unlikely. Taking our previous example of buying Dr. Martens shoes, the consumer could then choose to buy a mainstream brand feminine dress, and then have a more masculine hairstyle. This outfit would be built on contradictions and shows a personal identity. This growing complexity of consumer identity coupled with the push for a more open way of identity interpretation creates a new identity landscape. While consumers make conscious decisions to purchase and wear things in a particular way, the brand itself can use their subconscious desires or views of themselves to increase patronage. By creating a brand image that portrays a particular viewpoint they can entice individuals who choose to identify with the brand image, but maybe had not considered the product as of yet.

However, a brand community is constituted by members in the group, which implies that there are also those that are not included. Brands have to be aware of this because based on whatever image they choose to build they have to be aware of who they are isolating from participating in their brand community. While it is inevitable that not all people will be included in a brand community it is always an aspect that should be taken into consideration so that it is not too exclusive based off of their product and desired consumer base. Brands have to be careful that their out-group does not become an opposition that could affect their in-group. So brands have the complicated responsibility of building a strong brand identity and image while still

leaving room for consumer interpretation. If the brand image is too specific, they run the risk of not attracting new consumers, but if they are too broad they then expose themselves to the problem of being a brand or product no one identifies with. While some brands build their identity around exclusivity, such as Supreme, which built their image around purposeful exclusivity, it can be detrimental to brands who are not built on that ideal. High-street brands such as H&M which rely on being an everyday product for the every person, would not benefit from isolating certain groups from identifying with their brand. This shows the importance for brands to understand their own brand community, both in terms of their members and those outside of the community. The dilemmas presented create a more complicated and nuanced understanding of the importance a brand community plays on consumer interaction, customer loyalty, and general perceptions of the brand.

A brand community is driven by communication. Brands are no longer product-based infrastructures and now need to be more outward thinking. We argue that this is due to the contemporary societal shifts that have resulted in an increase in the scope of communication. Through technological advancements there has been an increase in accessibility to be able to communicate on a global scale. This means that brands now have to actively communicate with consumers or they run the risk of being forgotten or coming off as not equally invested in this brand-consumer relationship that consumers want to feel mutual. Not only do brands have to communicate with consumers but they have to do so properly or the relationship between consumer and brand will seem inauthentic to the consumer. While often times the amount of consumers will outnumber those involved in communication within the brand, it all comes down to perception. The consumers need to feel seen, heard, and recognized by the brand. Supported by Blustein, who argues that “57% of consumers say that human communication would increase their brand loyalty” (Blustein, A., 2018), indicating the importance of successfully communicating with consumers and creating a connected consumer-brand relationship, in order to obtain brand success in regards to brand communities. Not only are consumers talking to brands but also with each other.

### **3.1.3. Communication**

Consumer-to-consumer communication is an effective form of brand awareness that is not directly in the hands of the brand which gives some power over to consumers. This communication can look like showing off the product on social media, reviews left on websites,

online discussions, and sending product links to peers, the possibilities for user-generated content are vast. This increase in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and peoples trust and acceptance alongside people's reliance on the digital world for everyday activities has increased the importance of brands to recognize what conversations are taking place surrounding their brand. So while consumers are talking to each other, companies can witness and interpret from those conversations. Brands can start to look at the image or persona that individuals are choosing to portray and from there start learn about their consumers and what they want.

This method of expression of the self through possessions is magnified through the increased online presence that individuals find themselves participating in. This can be seen through personal social media accounts. These accounts are a fabricated version of the self that an individual chooses to portray to their followers (Dobson, Shields, Brady, & Carah, 2018). It can be argued that this has created an increase in awareness of how their possessions define themselves to others. Someone could create an image to post on social media with no filter, no makeup, and an average outfit, which depicts a person who refuses to join in on the popular hyper-stylized narrative that is present in social media (Sresta, Pedro, Santos, & Moreira, 2014). Showing that every decisions still portrays something to the outside world, also through the medium of social media there is an intent for this image to be consumed which varies from the simply putting out the same image while going about daily life. The intent behind social media shows the conscious decision that consumers have made to create an image of themselves. Brands have a wealth of information about their consumers now. Consumer information is currency that should be utilized to build brand success upon.

There is no question that the current brand and media landscape is overwhelmingly full of options for the consumer. This cacophony of noise creates the difficult task of breaking through to stand out from the crowd. A brand community is one way to break through the clutter and stand out. Due to the loyalty that is extended to a brand once the brand community is joined they can then rely on their consumers to continue to interact with them if they continue to deliver the type of community that the consumer wants to be a part of. With an established brand community then the option for increasing brand awareness is present, and that brand awareness can lead to more consumers joining the community creating a cycle of growth and relevance which could mean brand success.

While brand community is a strength when the attention on the brand is positive that attention also plays into how incidents can play out. The increased brand attention means increased scrutiny. The easy access to communication spreads news quickly and efficiently meaning that it is hard for a brand to runaway from their mistakes. However companies can recover with quick reactions and an informed decision on how to handle whichever situation arose. This is a risk that all brands face when they start to grow and gain attention. Brands also need to be aware of the fact that beyond intended meaning, with so many eyes on them the chance of their message being misinterpreted, or it having had offensive meaning without them realizing it, is more likely. These risks mean that brands need to have a higher sense of awareness and sensitivity in the content they are producing, or risk negatively affecting their brand image.

#### **3.1.4. Identity**

With the advantages of having a strong brand community clarified, it is then important to begin look at consumer identity. Without trying to understand consumer identity, building a brand community would prove difficult and inefficient.

Brand communities would not exist without consumers to build and participate in those communities. The relationship between brand community and consumer identity is important to understand on both sides. As previously mentioned if brands can understand their consumer then they can market to them. In terms of consumer identity there can be strong correlation between their identity and the brands they consume. In terms of consumer behaviour, it is important to remember that consumers have agency over their own decision-making process. Meaning that neither the brand or consumer have ultimate power over the other, but that it is a mutual relationship between the two. In a consumption-driven society, identity-creation becomes interlinked with what consumers choose to consume.

Social Identity Theory suggests that identity is divided into the personal self and the social self. The personal self is in regards to individual attributes and the social self looks at the individual within a group. As Georg Simmel stated, fashion is a reflection of a notion of trying to appease both the personal and social self (Simmel, G., 1957), indicating the relevance of understanding identity in the women's fashion industry. Consumers are using social media and brand communities to define themselves both in relation to the personal and social self. Due to

the rising ease of participating in groups that came with the internet and its different mediums, it is now easier for consumers to find and participate in groups. With this ease they can also join more groups, and more specialized groups. We argue, that this creates an even more complicated notion of identity than has previously existed. This complicated nature stems from the idea that the concept of the personal and social self are still perceived as relevant and an appropriate way to view identity through, however, the world, that individuals find themselves in, has changed irrevocably. Changes in technology and how it is used affects the concept of the personal and social self for the consumer in regards to its level of complexity due to the participation in more groups, information-sharing, and the idea of a curated online identity.

### **3.1.5. Identity Going Online**

The internet is filled with forums, social media platforms, and other community formats (Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang., 2012) that allow for people with particular interests to find each other and bond over their shared views. Not only are there more groups to be found, but finding these groups is as simple as typing your interests into a search bar. While there are more groups to participate in, this leads to more specialized groups, meaning that individuals can create more authentic and nuanced identities. Nuanced in the sense that interests can vary, so people are not limited to stereotypical groupings of interest but can define themselves through multiple groups that don't have to have any relation to each other. This allows people to stray further away from the previous notion of stereotypes, or fitting themselves into certain identity types and they can now build their own exclusive self. Meaning that most stereotypes are no longer as applicable for marketers to use towards an audience. Participating in more groups leads to an increase in information-sharing, these groups are places where people can create themselves from and communicate within. Nevertheless, with these individual group communications there is also the chance of intergroup communications, meaning that conversations take place between different communities. The sheer amount of conversations taking place at any given moment in and between online brand communities means more information for brands to take into consideration and an increasingly complicated process in how to interpret and use that information. Consumers are increasingly living more of their daily lives online. People can date, grocery shop, go to school, and do a plethora of everyday activities that used to only be in the physical realm (Morgan, J., 2015). This shift means that marketers should take notice of the online behavior of its customers. Considering that people

are spending more time online, participating in more groups, and, thus, creating more conversations and information, online individuals are respectively multi-layered.

### **3.1.6. Portrait of the Modern Day Consumer**

After having carefully and systematically discussed the theories of consumer culture, brand communities, consumer behaviour and identity using a modern day lense, the following section will provide a portrait of the modern day consumer built upon the previously investigation of theories.

Arguably the largest shift in consumer identity is the emergence of technological dependence. Consumers today live their lives online with an increasing frequency taking the place of physical interactions and transactions. A modern day consumer typically has social media accounts, participates in online conversations, and places value in these types of interactions. This type of consumer is increasingly creating an online identity for themselves through the different channels of the internet. This persona can be created for the personal or the social self, allowing the consumer to build a more nuanced and exclusive identity, much like Giddens' notion of "the Narrative of Self" (Giddens, A., 1991). In this technological world of community opportunity, consumers are not limited to building their identities based off of broad and unfitting ideals. Options mean that they can piece together their online identities through joining multiple specialized communities to create their own image. While they can most often find groups to join for their individual interests the culmination of all these groups to create an identity is a highly individualized process. This style of identity formation enhances the presence of identity diversity present in consumers. Not only does the emergence of the number of brand communities mean identities get more individualized but it also means that a consumers identity is a dynamic and changing concept. The ability to easily join or leave groups allows consumers to constantly reinvent themselves if they wished, this coupled with the decrease in brand loyalty can mean that brands need to reinvent their customer retention strategy. The ability to build authentic online identities with the wealth of community options allows for consumers to constitute identities beyond stereotypes. All of this online opportunity for the expression of self generates a power shift from brand to the consumer. While marketers can still hope to influence consumer purchases they are no longer as influential on consumer's thought processes. Due to the increase in information that consumers receive from different types of sources containing different types of messages, it is far more difficult for a brand to not only break through the noise

but to then also be persuasive in the way a consumer perceives the brand. The consumer is now a complex entity, with a more digital presence, has more power, and an ever-changing state of existence. This makes marketing in the modern day consumer landscape less predictable.

### **3.1.7. Diversity**

The women's fashion industry has found itself susceptible to the changes brought on by the shift in what the modern day consumer looks like. The aforementioned growth of the community landscape has brought with it a shift in brand loyalties. Namely, that they are weakened by the amount of possibilities that a consumer has available to them. Brands now have to actively attempt to pursue consumer loyalties while taking into account that consumers today have more power than they did before. Meaning that the increasingly diversity-focused social, global landscape that is happening is bleeding into other spheres of consumer life, beyond socially. This topic has now brought attention to the lack of diversity in all facets of life to forefront of consumers minds. In order to stay relevant brands now have to adapt to the conversation being had and consumers reactions to it. Due to its adoption by many as an important movement brands risk being seen as insensitive, uninformed, or callous if they do not actively seek to include diversity in their brand philosophy, or at least make it seem like they do to consumers.

Marketing in the age of this new type of consumer has to adapt to the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the consumer. This means that marketing strategies need to be adaptable and flexible to any situation or trend that may arise, due to the swift nature of the internet. Brands must be aware of internet culture, trends, topics and conversations being had revolving their brand image in order to be ready to face an issue or even to just simply keep up. With the quick nature of information-sharing that takes place. Brands also need to have a damage control mindset when eventually something is misconstrued or a negative reaction to them is spread online as seen in the incidents of the Pepsi-commercial starring Kendall Jenner (Batchelor, T. & Hooton, C., 2017) or in the "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" sweatshirt by H&M (West, S., 2018). Due to the increasingly individualized nature of consumer identity it is more complicated to create a message that is well received by all the customers of a brand. While it may not explicitly insult, if they feel left out it still could create a negative reaction or feeling of exclusion and therefore not relating to the brand. Brands now have to take into account this



heightened attention to inclusion and be aware of the effects it could have, if they are seen as not doing it or doing it incorrectly. Not promoting inclusivity could lead to customer loss, if the customers no longer identify with the brand, negative brand image, if the brands are perceived as indifferent, or any unfavorable connotations of the brand that could affect their overall business.

With this newly recognized consumer power individuals no longer have to settle for the women's fashion industry's set of beauty ideals. Instead consumers are demanding a revision of those beauty ideals, to include all types of women. Stereotypes by brands are now being challenged and brands now have to try and speak to this new inclusivity standard of what a consumer in the women's fashion industry looks like.

### **3.1.8. Subconclusion**

The aforementioned research and analysis answers the question of section 3.1.: *What is the current concept of consumer identity and how could that be affecting diversity?*

Understanding that there is a new consumer type defined by cultural hybridization, brand communities and their changes, the evolution of communication styles, the increasing complexity of identity, and the shift to digital platforms has allowed insight into what the modern consumer looks like. We have found that the modern day consumer is an intricate, digitally-minded, and continuously changing individual that is increasingly gaining power in the marketplace. This changing idea of what the consumer looks like and the power imbalance effects marketing in the way that they need to heed to consumer demands now more than ever. Currently consumers are demanding inclusivity but marketers should remain aware of what other trends and demands may emerge.

## 3.2. Consumer Perspectives on Diversity in the Women's Fashion Industry

In the following section, the quantitative data collected for the purpose of this thesis, will be introduced and the results of it will be evaluated in regards to the second subsequent question of the problem statement: *"In regards to diversity in the women's fashion industry, what are the consumer perspectives?"*.

### 3.2.1. Survey Results

To attempt to gain consumer perspective and comprehension on diversity in the women's fashion industry the survey asked a series of questions about consumers, their thoughts, and their practices regarding this issue. The survey can be found in [Appendix D](#).

In the initial section of the survey, created to better understand the survey audience, titled "About You" it is illustrated what type of consumer the survey managed to reach. On that basis it then became relevant to ask about their views and thoughts on diversity in the women's fashion industry in the section titled "Diversity In the Women's Fashion Industry". This structure creates an image of the individuals background which could be an influence on the particular answers they provide to the questions proposed in the survey.

The "About You" section showed the age, ethnicity, identification of gender, and insight into how the respondents feel about fashion and find inspiration for themselves. The primary age group of respondents was 20-29 years old, with 66 out of 87 respondents falling into that age range. When asked about their ethnicity, unsurprisingly due to our limited audience reach, the majority of participants, 90%, are caucasian. Out of the 87 respondents 4.6% are Black/African, 3.4% are Asian, and a mere 1% are Hispanic. In terms of gender identification participants stated that 62.4% identified as female, 25.3% as male, 1.1% as genderfluid, and 1.1% identified as non-binary. Concerning respondents source of fashion inspiration some common sources are Instagram, peers, surroundings, television/movies, physical stores, and magazines. Regarding the importance of fashion to the respondents, and a scale of 1-5 with 1 being very important and 5 being not important, 5.7% ranked it at 1, 31% ranked it at 2, 31% ranked it at 3, 27.6% ranked it at 4, and 4.6% ranked it 5.

This collected information shows that the average respondent is between 20-29 years of age, female identifying, caucasian, is somewhat interested in fashion and is influenced by different, previously listed, components of their daily life.

The section titled “Diversity in the Women’s Fashion Industry” takes a deeper look into the respondents thoughts regarding this subject. Looking at if respondents notice diversity in connection to women’s fashion beforehand, 58.6% said yes, 19.5% said no, and 21.8% claimed “I do not notice such things”. When asked about if they noticed diversity, and they answered yes to the previous question, then some popular answers on where they noticed it included advertising, media, that it was more evident in smaller brands, there is not enough but more than before, starting to notice it in global brands such as Benetton and H&M, mostly relevant to body size, and these were a few of the more popular notions about this issue. It was then inquired if respondents felt as if their ethnicity was represented enough in the women’s fashion industry 88.5% percent of respondents said yes, and 11.5% of respondents said no. Regarding the 11.5% percent of respondents who said “no” there was a strong correlation between those and the participants that did not identify as caucasian. Implying that the standard industry beauty ideal is being upheld, thus, the caucasian respondents felt represented, in terms of ethnicity, and others did not. Not only did they state there was a lack representation but the acknowledgement of it entails that this unbalanced representation is being noticed, leading to the demand for diversity.

Respondents were then asked if a company’s choice to display diversity or not, influenced their decision to purchase; 22 said yes, 57 said no, 4 said that they did not know, 2 said maybe, and 1 said sometimes. When asked whether or not they consider certain characteristics about a brand before purchasing the responses were that 46 said yes, 29 said no, 3 said maybe, 9 said sometimes. Some respondents elaborated on what those characteristics they looked at were and came up with sustainability, what models look like, ethics, diversity, and brand reputation. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being very loyal and 5 being very impartial to brands, 8% of respondents ranked it at 1, 33.3% at 2, 29.9% at 3, 18.4% at 4, and 10.3% at 5. In terms of if there is enough diverse representation in the women’s fashion industry 11.5% stated yes, 48.3% said no, and 40.2% said that they did not know. When asked to elaborate if they said “yes” or “no” the general consensus for those that said yes is that there is not enough and that it many times is not done properly, as well as pointing out that while there are improvements it is just the beginning of what still needs to be done. Lastly,

respondents were asked to describe the state of diversity in the women's fashion industry using three self-chosen words. The most common words affiliated can be found in the word cloud below.



The above words and themes were the most frequently mentioned by the 87 respondents to describe the current state of diversity.

### **3.2.2. Exploring the Results of the Survey**

Analyzing the results of the “About You” section of the survey it becomes clear that the average respondent is white, female that is between the ages of 20-29. The limitations of this have been previously discussed in the delimitation section 1.5. and, thus, will be taken into consideration throughout the analysis of the survey. When respondents were asked on where they find their fashion inspiration, there were two main categories of types of inspiration, the first being consumer built or chosen and the second being market-created. In terms of the consumer built or chosen option this consists of sources such as Instagram, peers, television, and other sources that consumers actively choose to participate in. This means that they are either seeking out this inspiration and relating to it or in terms of social media creating a feed that will

reflect inspiration they would like to see, and most often the ads that do show up tend to still fit the consumer's personal feed. With market-created content as inspiration it suggests that brands still have influence over consumers and what they want to wear. This demonstrates that consumers are influenced by a multitude of mediums, sources, and are open to a mix of inspirations. In terms of the importance of fashion to respondents most often individuals were not extreme in either direction, many chose to remain mid-range on the scale of 1-5, displaying that fashion is a consideration for them but not the most important one.

The second section of the survey titled "Diversity in the women's fashion industry" was intended to gain consumer perspective on the current state of diversity in the women's fashion industry. The majority of respondents replied that they have noticed diversity in the women's fashion industry, confirming that diversity is now a relevant thought on people's minds. Apart from the majority there was an almost equal split between respondent's "no" or "I do not notice such things". Those that responded negatively means that there could still be a distinct lack of diversity, and those that respond that they are not aware could be due to our young, white, female audience, which could possibly fit current standard beauty ideals. On a global scale, diversity does include ethnicity, religious orientation, body size, impairments, age, sexual orientation and gender. However, among the group of respondents, a majority of them were young, danish, caucasian, females, thus, the survey show, that diversity has different meaning for this particular group. Body size was the most mentioned aspect of diversity that was lacking according to respondents, this is reflective of the idea that diversity's purpose to reflect a realistic view of the world. Denmark is a largely homogenous society that has faced little integration until more recently (Athanasiadis, Cheng, Vilhjalmsson, Jorgensen, Als, Le Hallard, Espeseth, Sullivan, Hultman, Kjaergaard, Schierup, & Mailund, 2016), so it is clear that the biggest concern many of our respondents have in terms of diversity was body-related. These findings show that brands that need to be aware of who their consumers are and what they are looking for, and that there are many factors such as location, sex, age, etc. that need to be taken into account. What has been found in regards to diversity is one example of this that brands can see, but is relevant for marketing.

Respondents were then asked to elaborate upon their answers if they replied "yes", to if they noticed diversity in the women's fashion industry. Responses varied from that they noticed diversity in advertising, media, and some saying that they notice in all different brand sizes. Not only were respondents stating that it could be seen in a wide range of sources but they also

mentioned that there was still not enough diversity or not the most inclusive form of diversity. One respondent answered: *“I follow quite a few 'alternative' models, designers and the like (read disabled, transgender, non-caucasians, plus-size, etc.) on social media, as I wish to support their representation in media. I am, however, aware that they comprise a minority”*. This respondent is a prime example of the more informed and conscious consumer. While this respondent represents a highly aware type of consumer, that idea that the majority are noticing diversity shows the shift to a more conscious consumer as becoming an overall standard in the industry.

When asked if respondents thought that their ethnicity was represented enough in the women's fashion industry the majority of responses claimed that they did feel represented. However, again it is important to note that most survey respondents identify as caucasian, and as previously stated most often that is the set ethnicity for fashion beauty ideals. Nonetheless, looking at those that answered that they do not feel well-represented were non-caucasian. In this case causation is correlation, because of the current set of beauty ideals define the preferred of models as white. While the data is limited due to our largely homogenous survey audience, the responses reinforce the idea that white is the industry standard in terms of skin color, and that those of a different ethnicity do not feel equal representation.

Concerning purchasing decisions, respondents were asked if a company's choice to demonstrate diversity affected their decision or not and majority said no. One of the survey respondents described that as a white, female she was largely represented which means in terms of buying, she states that she has: *“(...) a tendency to purchase clothes when the model looks more like me in terms of skin-tone and hair colour, purely just because then I can gauge how that item will look on my skin colour (...)”*. Her response indicates that part of the thought process of purchasing is how clothes could look on you in a relative sense, this luxury is not afforded to people that do not fit industry standards and is part of the issue attempting to be solved through increasing diversity. In accordance with the idea that the industry benefits those that fit the set standards another white, 21-year-old female claimed: *“No, because I more often than not forget to think about the issue.”* However, those that responded that they do take diversity into consideration when purchasing from companies shed some light on why that was. One respondent explained that *“yes it does. fashion brands have a big influence on society - fashion therefore needs to be frontrunner when it comes to showing everyone whats right from wrong (...)”*. This response illustrates the rising social standard that consumers are holding

companies to. The response is from a more informed and active consumer, however this rising social consciousness is not the only reason for diversity, another respondent stated that, *“To me, it makes a brand much more interesting when showing diversity. It catches the attention. Maybe because it’s still “rare”. When Zara used an older woman (60’s) on their website, my first thought was “wow, cool!”*. This response is an example of another form of reasoning a consumer might have for responding to diversity. It does not set the limits to purely social value but to standing out as well.

The survey responses also show, that most of the respondents, to some extent, considered characteristics such as sustainability, ethics, diversity, and what the models look like as important. These characteristics are examples of what consumers are starting to look for in terms of brand ethics. It is a signal to brands that they need to take into consideration that consumers are more actively engaging in making informed decisions about whom they choose to purchase from and interact with.

In terms of loyalty to brands, respondents generally responded in the mid-range section of the 1-5 scale. While it was rare that they were extremely loyal or impartial it was more likely that consumers cared to some extent about brands but it was not the most important factor to them. The lack of importance of brand loyalty to the consumer indicates to brands that they need to become more active participants in obtaining and retaining consumers.

Regarding if there is enough diverse representation in the women’s fashion industry, the majority of participants claimed that no there was not or that they did not know. Respondents were then asked to elaborate upon their answers and many who said no said plainly that there was a lack of diversity or that the diversity that was present was not done properly. Many respondents also state that it is simply the beginning of the diversity movement in the women’s fashion industry and that there is still a long way to go. This indicates that consumers are hyper-aware of what is going into company image and not only are they aware but they are critical as well. Alongside this perceived critical nature of consumers, the notion that this is the beginning of change that will be seen shows women’s fashion brands that there is no room for regression on this issue, or they risk upsetting the consumer. The industry beauty standard is changing in response to consumers, but it is also changing the industry completely. Diversity is not a trend that will go in and out of fashion but from a consumer perspective it is something that needs to be set as the new industry norm. This can also be recognized, when respondents were asked to

describe the state of diversity in the women's fashion industry in just three words, and most respondents wrote words related to the development of diversity in the industry. The most common word was "developing" once again showing the progress that still needs to be made. Many of the other words discuss the current set beauty standards implying what the industry currently is and what it is lacking. To sum up the current state of diversity in the women's fashion industry, we argue based on the results from the survey and the research made, that it is still in its introductory phase in the industry and, thus, needs to carry on with the current momentum in order to become a staple in the industry. Therefore, we suggest, that In order for brands to remain relevant, maintain and gain consumers, and set themselves up appropriately for the future of the industry, diversity will have to become an integral part of their brand image.

### **3.2.3. Subconclusion**

When comparing the previously created notion of the "portrait of the modern day consumer" to the survey results and analysis there are clear connections, that show the consumer perspective regarding diversity in the women's fashion industry. Firstly, the assumption that the consumer now has a more digital presence is supported by the fact that respondents found their inspiration in places like Instagram, online magazines, online stores, and through other digital sources. The power shift in favor of the consumer is represented in the lack of brand loyalty respondents showed, and in their admittance that certain characteristics could affect their purchasing decision. This takes power away from brands who now have to work harder to make themselves appealing and relevant to consumers. With consumers noting the shift in the fashion industry and their consideration for diversity, that might not have been previously present it reinforces the idea that consumers are constantly in a dynamic and evolutionary state. The increasing complexity of consumers as evidenced by the survey and analysis illustrates the newfound challenge that brands face when trying to understand and approach consumers.



### 3.3. Embracing Diversity

The next area of focus will be answering the third subsequent question of how brands in the women's fashion industry can embrace diversity. The section will be split into two parts; the first section listed under 3.3.1: regards diversity and what it means to this thesis. The second section 3.3.2. will focus on what action brands can take in order to adapt to this changing landscape. For a better understanding of marketing activities the theory regarding brand community and value-creation by Schau, Muniz, and Arnould will be applied as a guiding perspective of what the activities can accomplish. Schau, Muniz, and Arnould's analysis and understanding of workings of value-creation for brand communities involving both brand and consumer allow for an understanding of the mechanics of the process of creating that value. They go on to further explain and categorize these mechanics into four categories which are Social Networking, Impression Management, Community Engagement, and Brand Use. These four categories are important to understand and be able to properly use brand communities as marketing tools.

#### 3.3.1. The Changing Consumer and Consumer Demands

It has already been established that diversity is a complex, multifaceted, and relevant issue that is affecting different industries, communities, and individuals on a global scale. In the theory section 2.2 we cultivated an understanding of diversity, in order to provide a more precise and pertinent way to apply diversity to the research.

As previously mentioned diversity will be used, specifically, in regards to "identity diversity" in order to represent the many differences that can be found amongst people. These differences could be sex, gender, orientation, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, immigrant status and so on. This choice of identity diversity was based off of the use of the intersectional approach, which unlike the unidimensional approach takes into account not only all the different aspects of identity but also the sum of those aspects.

In connection to the women's fashion industry, the identity approach to the concept of diversity creates a deeper knowledge of the consumers that make up the women's fashion industry. This is accomplished by attempting to understand consumers and the intricacies that

shape their identities and the communities they participate in - both intentionally and unintentionally.

In terms of the women's fashion industry, this diversity approach also allows for brands to attempt to navigate the increasingly saturated market. Referring to the lower barriers to entry caused by industry changes as a result of technological advances, the shift to digital store spaces, and other components that allowed for an easier entry into the industry. This ease of entrance meant that the fashion industry was no longer dominated solely by big names but now had to compete with less established brands. This increase in competitors meant that marketing had to improve in order to maintain and gain customers and stay relevant. This change results in a power shift from brand to consumer. While there is still power on both sides, some has shifted from the brand to the consumer as a result of decreasing customer loyalty and the increase of options in the market for the customers to choose from, as well as it being easier for customers to access information regarding brands. This shift means more sensitivity to consumer needs.

According to the McKinsey fashion report, one of the main focuses for the industry in 2019 is the increase in consumer awareness of social and environmental causes stating that:

*“Younger generations’ passion for social and environmental causes has reached critical mass, causing brands to become more fundamentally purpose driven to attract both consumers and talent. Consumers from some, but not all markets will reward players that take a strong stance on social and environmental issues beyond traditional CSR.”*

(McKinsey & Company & The Business of Fashion, 2019).

From the research collected and evaluated, it suggests that there is a power shift towards consumer wants rather than brand influences and this indicates that brands need to start listening. If brands are to start listening, then the message they are receiving is as stated above, consumers are demanding social responsibility. While this demand can take on many causes and shapes we are looking at social responsibility in the form of inclusivity.

Currently, the industry is at a crossroads with respect to what it is going to look like. As previously discussed, there is a stereotypical beauty standard that is in place and until now has been dominating the industry (examples can be seen in **Appendix A**). These examples depict a

skinny, white, edited, tall, female, that does not stray from cliched western ideals. However, there is a notable shift in the industry as seen in **Appendix B**. This shift depicts more women of color, different body sizes, impairments, varied religious backgrounds, transgender women, older, and unedited women as some of the examples of representation in the industry. This move towards a more diverse representation of women more closely depicts the various attributes of what the consumers of the industry look like in reality. However, there is still a long way to go before this is considered the industry norm. The consumers are demanding a change towards a more socially responsible brand, and as previously stated, diversity is a global social movement. As stated in the McKinsey report, the consumer will reward market players that take strong stances on social issues, hence brands that are adapting to the demand for diversity will benefit over brands that do not.

### **3.3.2. Building a Diversity-Inclusive Brand Through Communication**

As shown in the previous section brands need to incorporate diversity or face the consequences. Brands need to incorporate diversity and it should be reflected in their messages and marketing materials. Now more than ever brands need to show their inclusivity to put emphasis on the decisions they have made and to let the consumers know and participate. As previously mentioned, diversity offers the notion that *“a society is better and stronger when it promotes and encourages broad participation from all citizens”* (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze., 2014). This naturally occurring benefit, coupled with the consumer demand for social responsibility, indicates that now is the time for brands to adopt diversity as part of their brand identity, image, and community.

In order to communicate the brand identity by delivering meaningful and concentrated messages, brand communication can aid this endeavor. Through an array of different communication activities brands can influence consumer opinion about the product or brand itself. It is important for brands to note what type of brand image they wish to convey, functional or hedonic. As previously mentioned in section 2.5, a functional brand image is a more practical style and a hedonic brand image is a more emotionally-driven style of brand image. These brand image styles highlight that companies should be aware what style they are using and that there can be more to it than just displaying the product and its qualities. Brands should identify whether they want to use functional, hedonic, or a combination of the two to accomplish their brand image goals. To better accomplish the building of a strong brand presence, using

Integrated Marketing Communications as a guiding principle can help a brand maintain their focus and create a cohesive message to be recognized by.

One important form of a communication activity is visual rhetoric. Visual rhetoric is a common tool in the fashion industry due to the visual nature of fashion. Communication through visual rhetoric recognizes that visuals have the ability to convey messages, intentionally and unintentionally. Noticeably, visual rhetoric is a large part of brand image. Due to the visual nature of fashion, and due to it being a large component of how people engage with the world, it is an important part of brands communication strategy. Thusly, visual rhetoric is a strong tool for brands to use to build up their brand image, and in a way that depicts diversity. One example of this can be seen in **Appendix C**, which is the #Aeriereal campaign that shows unedited photos of women that range in ethnicity, size, and other components that do not fit the current beauty ideals. This is an example of using a component of visual rhetoric known as body rhetoric which is defined as “rhetoric that foregrounds the body as part of the symbolic act”. (Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016). This ad defies many current beauty ideals and does so openly and without remorse, it isn’t a mistake or an inability to photoshop, it is a blatant refusal which gives power to their message. Defying body ideals is one of many forms of progressiveness that a brand can choose to visually convey. Not only does it show a socially conscious brand image but it also garners results. This can be seen through the 38% sales increase that Aerie received after this ad campaign (Ell, K., 2018). A brand can also expect to see these results by using social media, also with this they can expect to gain market share as well, if done correctly (Ell, K., 2018). Following along with the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications then all visual rhetoric used by the brand should reflect this message. That means that not only should advertisements show diversity, but also runway shows, online sales images, social media, and all components of the brand image.

With the idea that brands need to be increasingly aware of their brand image, it is now more true than ever with consumers and brands going into the online arena. As discovered in from the survey results seen in **Appendix D**, consumers are seeking out an authentic brand experience. Marketers can react to this by creating a brand persona that is able to bring a human-like quality to a digital experience (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). With creating and ensuring a brand persona, brands are able to set up a more authentic experience for its consumers. With this shift into the digital world brands are no longer held to past geographical boundaries and can reach almost anyone with an internet connection. Not only is there is shift

towards digital technologies but more specifically social media platforms. Brands are increasingly communicating and interacting with consumers online. Social media platforms enable consumers to communicate with one another, connect with brands, and vice versa (Finne, Å. & Gronroos, C., 2017). This increase in communication between consumers surrounding the idea of brands helps to create a brand community. It does so through connecting consumers, allowing conversations to take place, and bringing a more personal attachment to the brand through investment of time and effort for the consumer.

The time spent on and importance of social media means that brands now need to be diligent and aware of what they are putting out there in regards to their brand image and identity but also regarding what is being said about them. This indirect influence of communication on a brands image, is also a factor that needs to be taken into consideration and understood by marketers.

The format of traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) has now shifted to also include electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) which is interpersonal conversations concerning a brand or product that are commercially-minded but not driven and take place in the digital world and amongst its vast audience (Ismagilova, E., Dwivedi Y., Slade, E., & Williams, M., 2017). With this increase in communication surrounding brands online, it is important for brands to be aware and ready to act and react to maintain brand image and identity. A formerly mentioned study done by the US Office of Consumer Affairs found that brands have more to lose from negative views than they have to gain from positive ones (Mangold, Miller, Brockway, 1999). Which suggests that communication should also focus on damage control, whether it be increased customer service, refunds to those dissatisfied, or other methods of compensation and fixing brand image in an unhappy consumers view. While there still needs to be a focus on spreading positive eWOM, it is important to have contingency plans in place or it could turn into larger scandals such as the aforementioned H&M monkey advert scandal.

These suggestions for communication activities fulfill the standards of the Social Networking, Impression Management, and Community Engagement purposes suggested by Schau, Muniz, and Arnould from the research “How Brand Community Practices Creates Value”. These standards set help create value for a brand community, by focusing heavily on the relationship between consumer and brand and what opportunities that can generate brand value. In regards to the first category; Social Networking, the purpose is to create, enhance, and

sustain connections between brand community members. In terms of the second category; Impression Management, it is intended to have an outward focus on creating positive brand impressions, encourage brand enthusiasm, and brand community into areas that brand community is not already a part of. The third category; Community Engagement regards reinforcing the engagement of community members within the brand community (Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). Visual rhetoric falls in the realm of Impression Management due to its outward focus and intent to create positive inclinations towards the brand. In the case of eWOM it ties into Impression Management in regards to its ability to react to unfavorable consumer comments and correct them or to encourage positive interactions. It also falls under the category of Social Networking due to its encouragement of community interaction which strengthens brand community ties between members. Social Media enhances ties, so it can be considered connected to Social Networking, alongside that it can be used as a tool to interact with consumers opinions making it an Impression Management tool, and finally it encourages member engagement within a community so it is also considered in terms of Community Engagement. The application of “How Brand Community Practices Creates Value” by Schau, Muniz, and Arnould is an analysis tool that marketers can use to gauge the perceived effectiveness of suggested marketing activities that are intended to create brand community value.

Visual rhetoric, social media, an increase of a brands online presence, persona through an Integrated Marketing Communication strategy are a strong marketing tool combination that can be used by brands. The use of these tools can then be further analysed using the theory application by Schau, Muniz, and Arnould, providing a better understanding of implications of the results these tools may garner. The effect of using and understanding these tools can close the distance between the brand, consumers, and other stakeholders.

### **3.3.3. Building a Diversity-Inclusive Brand Through Marketing**

While Integrated Marketing Communications plays an important role in building and maintaining brand presence, pairing this strategy with marketing activities will generate more success. In marketing, much like in communications, activities are increasingly happening online. While traditional marketing avenues are still at work such as magazines, tv-commercials, and mail campaigns much of this has shifted from being physical to going online. This means that marketing activities now take the form of emails, e-newsletters, online advertising,

influencer marketing, social media accounts, affiliate marketing and other forms of online marketing as outlined in section 2.9 regarding marketing activities and theory. With this increase in ease of creation and distribution of marketing materials online, brands are able to reach consumers more easily than ever before but that also means so can everybody else. This ease of entrance means there is more competition in the market in order to be heard and stand out (Pettinger, T., 2008). So it is not solely about using all of the previously mentioned marketing materials but using the right mix in the right way. There is no perfect formula for a brand in this quickly changing landscape, but instead relies upon adaptability and understanding of the market and the consumers in it. As previously stated, the introduction of online communication and marketing has opened up a channel of communication between brand and consumer, consumer and consumer, and a general increase in communication from all sides.

This changing landscape has also introduced a new marketing tool. User-generated content is content created by the users of a brand and can be an effective way for brands to gain free marketing from its customers, however there can also be negative consequences to letting customers be in charge. User-generated content can come from comment sections, conversations taking place about the product online, video reviews made by influencers, and other forms of communication that is out of the brands control. This leaves brands vulnerable to both positive and negative user-generated content, which could help or hinder their sales and reputation. Not only does this affect sales and reputation but it could do something for brand image as well. Due to the transfer of power, marketers now have less control over brand image; if an instagram-user dedicated to popular fashion, with followers looking for popular fashion ideas, decides to post while wearing brands that are advertised as alternative it could potentially shift their image from a chosen sub-culture into a popular culture without their approval. A real world example of how user-generated content can create momentum and attention for a brand is in relation to the #Aeriereal campaign that can be found in **Appendix C**. The online community was encouraged to share body positive images of themselves using the #Aeriereal hashtag, this took off and there are now more than 167,000 instagram posts with the hashtag (Instagram.com, 2019), since it was created in 2014 (Ell, K., 2018). This encouragement is also a way for brands to stay in control of what is being posted. Not only did it interact with and grow the online body positive community, but it also strengthened and expanded the aerie brand community. Online marketing can be a skillful way of embodying diversity and inviting the online community to take part in the discussion, which helps build a sense of brand community, and improve brand image and brand identity.

An important newer way for users to communicate, build communities, share interests, learn about new products, and showcase their online identity is social media. Besides the previously stated communicative changes that came along with social media for brands, there are many more ways for brands to benefit from social media usage. Brands can build stronger communities online through social media, they could do this using their own accounts, creating interactive components such as hashtag challenges or any sort of engaging activity through social media. On social media consumers can share their interests with one another, and this encourages brands to promote such behavior in any way they can in order to gain market salience over competitors. Consumers also choose to showcase the online identities they have built through social media, this can be used by marketers to gather readily available information about consumers and use this information to understand consumers and their place in the market to a greater extent. Concerning diversity, brands can use social media to further promote inclusivity and their utilization of it. This is seen being done through a myriad of different channels, however, social media is a platform that enables brands to carefully construct a diverse and supportive image.

In a marketing capacity, the categories introduced by Schau, Muniz, and Arnould also come into effect. With user-generated content it falls under the idea of Community Engagement due to a brands ability to spark conversation and involvement through activities that include this. Social Media from a marketing perspective once again involves Social Networking, Impression Management, and Community Engagement. This differs from the communication-based perspective due to the activities intent to convey product or brand-based messages rather than focusing solely around the conversation already taking place about them, it is a more active role rather than reactive. Being able to cater to these different categories through communication and marketing activities strengthens brand community by building collective value-creation to benefit the brand. The women's fashion industry is affected by the idea of brand communities and consequently carrying out practices that can be defined by the four categories should be taken into consideration when trying to discern what consumers want.

#### **3.3.4. Building a Diversity-Inclusive Brand Through Social Marketing**

Currently the climate of consumer knowledge calls for a higher standard of ethics by brands for issues ranging from brand production to the quality of the leaders in the boardroom. This push for responsibility along with the increasing demand for transparency has created a need for a brand to start to take into consideration what they stand for. Social marketing can be



utilized by brands who wish to encourage a higher standard of social responsibility in the world around them by reflecting this higher standard in their own actions. While social marketing is a noble endeavour that ultimately wishes to change the behavior on a global scale, it is difficult to accomplish outside of small, independent brands (Dibb, S., & Carrigan, M., 2013).

With the aforementioned ties between diversity, positive social movements, and change it is clear that companies that push for diversity are aiding in social marketing. However, the intent behind the marketing campaigns should be taken into account and not just the message. Social marketing intends to better the world, through being proactive rather than reactive. This makes it complicated to declare which companies are including diversity as a push for it rather than as a reaction to the demand for it. Social marketing is not simply mixing traditional and modern marketing tools for the right purposes, but it is about changing behavior (Dibb, S., & Carrigan, M., 2013).

However, authentic social marketing is much more difficult to accomplish as a larger brand, especially established high-street brands. This is due to the complexity of being a larger and affordable brand in the eyes of the public. Meaning that cost of production needs to stay within an acceptable range for them to be able to keep offering prices that the everyday person can afford (Perry, M., 2018). High-street brands also normally have more employees that work within a brand name with an established company culture, due to the amount of store fronts, sheer size of products produced, and the amount of manpower it takes to keep a company such as that running, making it more difficult to change. Due to the size and complexity of high street brands using social marketing would have a high cost that could hurt revenue and affect the company in the long run. To combat this high cost it would make more sense from a revenue standpoint for high-street brands to imitate companies that are successfully executing social marketing. They can look to brands' campaigns, philosophy, or culture to inspire their own ideas on how to offer consumers the socially conscious brand experience that they are seeking. Using accomplished social marketing brands as inspiration allows larger brands to cater to consumers and minimize risks to themselves, they simply have to make consumers think that they are bettering the world with their choices to interact with the brand, even if it is not the whole truth. While social marketing is intention-based if it, or at least the imitation of it, becomes the industry standard it could still yield positive change on a global scale.

This means that if done successfully in the women's fashion industry in terms of diversity it could change the behaviors of those in and out of the industry. This could look like it being

commonplace to see a wealth of diversity in the boardroom and on the runway, or for consumers to naturally respond to and endorse companies that promote diversity, and reject the current commonplace of beauty standards. While social marketing may not be the intent behind each company promoting diversity, it can be argued that the companies that used social marketing in the industry forced the hand of others and brought to light the lack of diversity in the women's fashion industry.

### **3.3.5. Applying the Perspectives of Social Identity Theory and Social Impact Theory**

To further understand the relationship and influence between brand communities and individual identity, delving into Social Identity Theory and Social Impact Theory will allow for a well-rounded view of this. According to the previously mentioned definition by Henri Tajfel, social identity is understood as the part of an individual's identity which is formed by their awareness of their own participation in social group(s) coupled with the emotional implications of belonging and participating to the group(s) (Tajfel, H., 1974). Social Identity theory addresses an individual's agency over the creation of their identity by group association, it implies a self-understanding of the impact that membership has on their sense of self. However, it is important to note that groups themselves have the power to influence an individual, whether it be in-groups or out-groups. This is known as Social Impact theory which is an extension of Social Identity theory. It takes into consideration that individuals can change behaviours due to pressure from their environment. This change can be a result of social forces that stem from persuasion, humour, embarrassment, threats, or other modes of manipulation from an influencer (Ozuem, W., & Azemi, Y. 2018). To gain the best understanding of group-influence on identity, using both theories simultaneously allows for a comprehensive approach.

Brands can take advantage of this information to gain a better understanding of consumers and their behaviour in groups and to more efficiently use their brand community and image to entice more consumers. Being able to effectively understand and interact with consumers will afford brands to be able to more efficiently target consumer interests, promote inter-group communications, and bring more attention to the brand. With the complicated relationship between brand and consumer that has manifested, being able to understand consumers will allow for better marketing practices that are more likely to yield positive results, such as increasing sales, brand value, and market share. With the increased changes and complications that the demand for diversity by consumers has put on brands, social identity and

Social Impact Theory brands have offered a better method to gain insight about their consumers and to apply that insight to marketing activities. This can help brands cut through the clutter of the volume of options consumers are faced with in the woman's fashion industry, in an effective and lasting manner. A format of using social identity and Social Impact Theory could be through collaborations to bring a new perspective in order for brands to embrace diversity.

### **3.3.6. Examining Collaborations as a Diversity-Focused Marketing Tool**

The suggested use of collaborations as a diversity-focused marketing tool can have both positive and negative effects based on how they are used by a particular brand and what message they are implying. With the understanding that collaborations would be done to promote diversity, the adaptable, flexible, and creative nature of diversity is mirrored in the like-minded attributes of collaboration itself (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014).

Collaborations can take many shapes, such as; collaborations in the traditional sense between a company and a designer, tied to a particular event, linked with donations to a cause, dedication towards using certain types of model or editing guidelines, or having a Corporate Social Responsibility focus are a few of the focuses that collaborations could have. While collaborations between company and designer are more traditional, explicitly inviting diversity into that relationship brings a fresh take to it. This could be done by using designers that are women of color, focused on body inclusivity, or showing women from different ethnicities and religions, or just any designer that is going to break the stereotypes of the current beauty standard in the industry. Brands can also affiliate themselves with already established events that promote diversity such as the #Metoo-movement, the Black Lives Matter cause, environmental causes, and other social movements that are gaining momentum. One example of this is H&M's creation of a Pride collection that promotes pride and equality for all, that has started to come out during the height of global Pride month (LeSavage, H., 2018). This campaign shows support for the LGBTQ community which has not always been openly represented in the fashion industry. Campaigns with a focus on established events promoting diversity can help draw publicity to a brand and capitalize on the social focus on ethics, in this case with a specific focus on inclusivity, currently happening.

Another format of tying in diversity, could be attaching the concept of donating some of the proceeds from products to a particular cause that promotes inclusivity. This presents the opportunity to flex purchasing influence by playing into consumers increased awareness of

social movements and encourage purchasing by linking it with positive community effects. Another form of collaboration that can be used is by employing particular types or groups of models. This could look like using plus-size models, various ethnicities, older models, models with impairments, or any conscious decision to actively confront and refuse to play by the rules of standard beauty ideals. If properly done and advertised the use of these models along with the fast-paced, inter-group, and easily accessible format of internet information-sharing could lead to widespread publicity, reinforcing current consumer loyalties, and drawing attention to the brand in terms of new consumers. Collaborations can also look like editing promises, such as the #Aeriereal campaign in **Appendix C**, which promises not to photoshop any of its models' bodies. Campaigns or public promises such as this play into the current social climate of inclusivity and encourages positive brand image in the eyes of the consumers, that are seeking inclusivity. Corporate social responsibility attributes can also be used in collaboration efforts and can show positive traits of a company's own personal dedication to social responsibility. This can have a positive effect due to the increasing consumer demand for transparency and demand for corporate responsibility (Houlihan, M., & Harvey, B., 2018). These are a few examples of collaborative efforts that could be used as models, and the effects they could have if done properly by brands to encourage diversity.

In the following section collaborations will be further examined as a diversity-focused marketing tool using a SWOT analysis. This will explore the use of collaborations as a marketing tool in terms of strengths and weaknesses to the tool, the opportunities that follows it and the threats that can be posed to the brand by adopting the tool.

### **Strengths:**

Using collaborations as a marketing tool has many positive benefits that can benefit a brand. Since trends will always come and go in the fashion industry following trends can be expensive for brands that rely upon being relevant, however, collaborations can ease some of the costs associated with that. It can ease monetary costs by not being a total remake of the brand image but merely an additional and interchangeable aspect to it. Not only is this a monetary benefit but it also protects the brand image itself. With collaborations, brands do not need to reinvent or reassess their brand image which would take a lot of time and effort and could pose large problems, instead they can just add in qualities to their brand image that increases the number of people who can relate to or are interested in a brand. Retaining a set brand image helps maintain customer loyalty because customers will know what to expect from

a brand. Also if the addition or shift in the brand image is done in a collaboration format, then they are not solely responsible for it and thus it is a temporary and shared responsibility. The ease of the interchangeable nature of collaborations makes it an attractive tool to use time and time again, and can be done so in a myriad of different ways, as introduced in the previous section. This marketing tool is adaptable to fit different trend formats that could come about and can be highly curated to suit individual brands' needs. The low investment, versatility, and distinguishable nature of collaborations makes them a favorable and low-cost option for brands to maintain relationships and relevance with the modern consumer.

#### Weaknesses:

While collaborations can be a strong and reliable marketing tool for a brand there is a liability in using them. One of those risks is if a brand solely relies on collaborations as an all-encompassing tool. With the increase in easily accessible information, eWOM, and the quick nature of the internet if a brand is found out to be hypocritical by having other aspects that are not aligned with the collaboration that. With the increase in communication in terms of speed and inter-group behavior, the negative effects of a fault or misinterpreted marketing material being exposed are unpredictable based upon the current climate and how far spread the message is sent out, but it could be calamitous. This newfound danger of the quick spread of negative information also means that there is a risk that if the collaboration is not executed well or is misinterpreted then it can negatively affect brand image and further discourage consumer loyalty, since brands have much to lose from negative reviews (Mangold, Miller, Brockway., 1999). While this is a risk brands take, with the fast nature of the internet, and the 24-hour news cycle style of information-sharing the public burns hot and fast about an issue until the next one is brought to their attention (Rosenburg, H. & Feldman, C.S., 2009). Apart from the risk that communication and the internet pose, it is also important to note the effort that does go into a quality collaboration that has the potential to be effective. Collaborations call for a deep understanding of trends, both current and future, and understanding how to utilize and convey them and in what medium and to whom. Those are just a few of the aspects that need to be taken into consideration with a collaboration. Not only is it an intricate endeavor but it also calls for work to be done that is outside the brand. This use of external company resources indicates that there is a loss of power and control by the brand and this time, research, and effort will need to be utilized to make sure the collaborator is the most suitable option and is willing and able to properly take part in the relationship. While collaborations are still a strongly recommended marketing tool for brands to keep up-to-date it is important to be aware of the

complexity presented by the current internet communication culture, the collaboration's message, both intended and unintended, and the amount of effort that it takes to achieve a successful and relevant collaboration.

#### Opportunities:

The opportunities that a prosperous collaboration can present are abundant for a brand. Using this marketing tool allows them to access a new customer base that they may have not been able to reach beforehand. This stems from the inter-group nature of information-sharing that draws the attention of those not directly dealing with the brand. While the quick nature of the internet can be a drawback if the message is misconstrued by the public, contrarily, it can bring about positive attention, media or otherwise, and plenty of it if the right message is spread through the correct channels. Positive attention can increase awareness, be free publicity, increase sales traffic, and generally increase interactions between brand and consumers. Due to the interchangeable nature of collaborations, if used correctly and kept up-to-date with current trends, it allows a brand the ability to remain a relevant while, as previously stated maintaining their brand image. A brand has the opportunity to adapt and grow with technology and the tendencies of its consumers, all while maintaining their core brand image thus being able to invest less into adapting and remaining at the forefront of consumers minds. The presented opportunities are broad and important concepts that afford brands the chance to expand their consumer base, increase brand exposure, and retain cultural relevance.

#### Threats:

Collaborations as a marketing tool are susceptible to events that could reduce effectiveness. One possibility is the speed at which trends change. This poses a threat because an emerging trend could come about quickly and in result make the current collaboration effort a brand is working on or presenting outdated. Alongside this, if collaborations become commonplace in the women's fashion industry that could result in a decrease in the success of the collaboration. If the market place is over-saturated with one marketing tool it will not stand out to individuals and is less likely to garner any response from consumers for a brand. With the use of collaborations, brands need to take into account the uncertain nature of trends and the current mix of marketing tools that are being used in the women's fashion industry at any given moment.

To sum up the SWOT analysis of collaborations as a marketing tool for increasing a brand's focus on diversity can be an effective tool to use, if integrated into a brands marketing mix. Collaborations can prove effective, cost-efficient, but also must be appropriate to the situation, cause, and target group and still maintain alignment with the overall brand image. Therefore, based off the SWOT analysis it is suggested that brands adopt this strategy as a complementary tool into their marketing mix in order to embrace diversity and any future trends that may follow.

### **3.3.7. Subconclusion**

Understanding diversity with respect to the women's fashion industry and its effect on the brand consumer relationship allows for actions to be taken to start to access this growing consumer demand shaping the fashion landscape. With the knowledge for brands that consumers are more aware of social issues and willing to allow that to influence their purchasing decisions it is made clear that brands now need to act in accordance. One way for brands to proactively pursue the consumer demand for diversity could be through the suggested use of collaborations, through this tool and others like it brands can attempt to maintain a relevant and socially acceptable brand image. Any tools used should be creating value for the brand community and can do so by aligning with Schau, Muniz, and Arnould's four categories: Social Networking, Impression Management, Community Engagement, and Brand Use. Maintaining a strong brand image encourages brand community, stability and growth, which can help combat the decreasing loyalty and increasing amount of options available to consumers. On a communicative level, brands can use a combination of visual rhetoric, social media, and an increased online brand presence and persona using an Integrated Marketing Communication strategy can further shorten the distance that has occurred between brands, consumers, and other stakeholders. Understanding diversity and integrating the initiatives that promote stronger brand image, allows brands to push a diversity-minded profile and can be an active start in order to adapt to the consumer demand for diversity.

### 3.4. A Discussion of How Consumer Culture Shape Diversity Movements in the Women's Fashion Industry

With the three subsequent questions of the problem statement now having been researched and analysed, it is now possible to properly answer the main research question of this thesis in a well-researched, informed and profound manner. The primary research question being answered is:

*“How does consumer culture shape diversity movement's in the women's fashion industry?”*

The following section will answer this question, which is the culmination of understanding the modern-day consumer, gaining quantitative consumer insight, and understanding the current concept of diversity in the women's fashion industry and its future using an inductive research approach.

The answer being presented is mainly applicable to high-street brands or those with similar target consumer groups, due to the large and dynamic nature of the consumer base, the established brand image, and due to the difficulties they face in adapting in this fast-paced landscape. The focus on high-street brands is of great value as a result of the top 20 companies in the fashion industry accounting for 97% of the economic profit (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019). Smaller brands will not face the same struggles and are less indicative of industry standards, thus evaluating their involvement with diversity movements is not reflective of the women's fashion industry as a whole.

In accordance with the studies conducted in the State of Fashion Report 2019 done by McKinsey and the Business of Fashion, it is predicted that consumer demands and needs will currently be shaping the future of the industry. The industry is further defined as changing, digital, and fast (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019). To better understand the consumer wants and needs it is important to take a look at the changing nature of consumer culture. The Consumer Culture Theory section in the theoretical framework lays the foundation for marketers to begin to understand the impact that consumer culture has on the relationship between consumers and the market.



In the following section, a discussion of consumer culture and how it is currently shaping diversity movements in the fashion industry will be carried out on the basis of the theories applied in the theoretical framework regarding diversity and consumer culture.

### **3.4.1. Reviewing Diversity from a Consumer Culture Theory Perspective**

Consumer Culture Theory is a rich field of study that has many contributors allowing for a complex and widespread view of the study. However, for the purposes of this thesis and to allow for the most in-depth and complimentary discussion, Consumer Culture Theory has been built from the viewpoint of Arnould and Thompson coupled with the expanding views of Askegaard's understanding of the theory, and for a modern perception of the theory, Holton addresses the effect of cultural hybridization on consumer culture. The collection of these specific theory viewpoints allows for the construction of a version of Consumer Culture Theory that is relevant and applicable to the current consumer landscape in the women's fashion industry.

Arnould and Thompson highlighted four means to better understand Consumer Culture Theory in what it is being applied to, in this case the women's fashion industry, those means are: consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, socio-historic patterning of consumption, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer's interpretive strategies.

Consumer Identity Projects refers to the idea that consumers are able to build an individualized identity through the products they choose to purchase and represent themselves with (Arnould, E. & Thompson, C., 2005). This is supported by the derived portrait of a modern day consumer in section 3.1. This section indicates the strong correlation between consumer identity and consumption choices. Consumers consist of the personal and social self, meaning that they have identities created for individualistic purposes and not related to any specific group membership and the social self which is in relation to memberships and societal intent (Helal, G. & Ozuem, W., 2018). Another influential factor to take into account with the modern consumer is the newfound reliance and importance of the internet to their sense of self and how they interact with the world. Consumers now have an online presence, every online interaction is a chance to leave a trace of themselves whether it be through social media, online reviews, or subscriptions. These are a few examples of how much of consumers lives take place online. The complex and seemingly infinite nature of internet culture grants individuals the ability to create a highly

nuanced and distinct online identity. The boundaries that stereotypes provided are no longer as forcefully relevant for an individual to have to outwardly and inwardly define themselves through. With the opportunities individuals now have to build their identities, brand's now have to adapt to this type of consumer style. Some of the challenges they face with the modern day consumer is that the consumer has a far easier time joining and leaving brand communities, this is due to the ease at which they can find options with the use of the internet. The fast-paced and informational nature of the internet means that brand awareness is easier to spread, increasing the amount of brands vying for space in the women's fashion industry. With this increase in the amount of brands and consumer awareness of the amount of options made available to them, it is now more difficult than ever for brands to break through all the noise and have their message received by the consumer. This increasing difficulty for brand awareness and ease in consumers ability to shift their loyalties has led to a shift in the power dynamic from brand to consumer. According to the McKinsey Report, *"(fashion players) need to take an active stance on social issues, satisfy consumer demands for ultra-transparency and sustainability (...)"* (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019), addressing these consumer demands can help brands appropriately respond to consumers. Diversity is a social issue that is currently part of a large global conversation, including diversity in their marketing and perhaps even in their business practices is a way for brands to adhere to consumers and break through the clutter of brand options. Listening to consumer demands allows for brands to use the idea of Consumer Identity Projects due to the fact that they are giving consumers what they want and allowing their brand to be part of how they identify themselves. Understanding the consumer means that marketers can create more suitable, targeted, and well-received marketing materials that will have a greater effect on consumers, if used correctly.

Marketplace cultures is the concept that brands have the ability to build and sustain a culture indicative to their brand image which consumers are able to participate in and identify themselves by (Arnould, & Thompson, 2005). Being able to successfully build a marketplace culture could be one way to combat the increasing amount of competition in the women's fashion industry. Not only is it a way to stand out and encourage loyalty but it is also a way for brands to assume agency over their image and community. This is supported by Askegaard's contribution to the field of Consumer Culture Theory which suggests that brands have more market power than originally assumed. Askegaard states that there is an *"increasing focus not just on the consumer as a market actor but on more complex institutional systems of market interaction as constitutive of consumer culture (...)"* (Askegaard, S., 2018). Meaning that while

there has been a power shift to allow consumers more power, brands still hold an influential amount of control that they can exercise to benefit them as a result of this increasing complexity. Marketplace cultures make it possible for brands to utilize the influence they still have over consumer consumption, however, brands need to be aware of what the consumer is demanding. According to the McKinsey report, brands need to “*have the courage to “self-disrupt” their own identity and the sources of their old success in order to realise these changes and win new generations of customers.*” (McKinsey & Company, & The Business of Fashion., 2019). As suggested in section 3.3.2, a method for brands to successfully be able to “self-disrupt” their own brand identity is through the use of collaborations as a marketing tool. In the analysis of collaborations it is proposed that it is a useful way to adhere brand image to current trends without having to completely update the entire brand image, community, identity, and any other aspects of the brand that would be affected. Thus a collaboration can be a tool that grants brands that are too well-established the ability to seemingly “self-disrupt” their image without having to commit to the massive undertaking of changing their brand identity and philosophy. Instead of committing to a trend that could fade into irrelevance by the time they managed to shift their company culture, collaborations allow for a more realistic option for brands to react to current and emerging trends, such as diversity or the next big social issue that consumers demand representation for. Therefore marketplace cultures as a response to the decreasing consumer loyalty and increasing amount of brands, can be done in an efficient and adaptable manner through marketing tools such as collaboration, allowing for brands to keep up with the dynamic and ever-changing nature of consumer demands in the women’s fashion industry.

The socio-historic patterning of consumption is the idea that social capital has an influence on consumption choices made by individuals (Arnould, E. & Thompson, C., 2005). This is evident when looking at consumer identity and its link and influence on consumer purchases as mentioned in section 3.1. That connection is existent due to consumers willingness to define themselves by what they choose to purchase, and the knowledge that they will be defined by what they are seen as purchasing or representing themselves by.

Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer’s interpretive strategies takes into account the idea that consumers are influenced further by consumption choices they have already made which could then have further consumption effects or even influence ideological ideas (Arnould, E. & Thompson, C., 2005). What this entails is that consumers are influenced by what they surround themselves with so if a brand is aware of the way they may think, then it can

target the consumer more efficiently. Taking into consideration the survey responses analysed in section 3.2 consumers are making it evident that they are starting to think about their purchases with statements such as *“Sustainability and their core statements are usually the most important, as it reflects on whether a company is willing to pursue a diverse and sustainable future.”* (can be seen in **Appendix D**). This statement shows, that consumers are willing to look into a brand and its awareness and reaction to causes of importance to the individual, so in this case sustainability. The increasingly seeking nature of consumers for brands that are part of their ideology, is a sign that brands need to take consumer's causes into consideration, if it relates to enough of their target group. However, as previously mentioned it is difficult for established brands to change their image completely but that may not be necessary, as one consumer states, whose sentiments were shared by many, that: *“I don't consider that much. But most diversity would probably indicate to me that the brand is better”* (can be seen in **Appendix D**). The statement implies that the consumer is willing to settle for a surface level amount of involvement and will not spend their time delving into the depth and authenticity of brand intent in a certain cause, in the women's fashion industry. This means that easier-to-use marketing tools, much like collaborations, could provide companies the ability to regard and react to their target audiences primary causes and concerns, such as diversity, without having to overhaul the entire company structure and image. Ultimately mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer's interpretive strategies can be utilized by brands who pay attention to consumer demand in order to efficiently and effectively create for and market to their target group.

### **3.4.2. Reviewing the Contribution of Cultural Hybridization**

Cultural hybridization is rapidly influencing how consumer culture shapes diversity movements in the women's fashion industry. According to Holton, cultural hybridization refers to the mixture of cultural components and the removal of previous barriers that prohibited or dissuaded this combination of cultural elements (Holton, R., 2000). Globalization and the heavy reliance on the internet in everyday life further sped along this process. The increasing amount of migration and integration of people from their place of origin to another is making culture a borderless concept, and creating new shared meanings (Kobrin, S., 2017). The internet is making the spread of globalization quicker and less complicated for individuals to take part in and adopt.

This shift in cultural meaning is reflected in the field of consumer culture as well. With the change of consumers interaction with brands more often moving from physical stores to online interactions, the increasing use of social media, and the ease of communication, this results in a more borderless community in the women's fashion industry. Much like the example of the United States of America as a "melting pot" of cultures and the influence that has, the consumer culture in the women's fashion industry has taken on a mixture of cultures that now need to be factored in consumer interactions (Wildes, S. J., 2017). Online communities allow for people from all over the world, who belong individually to a plethora of different groups, to come together and create an inclusive space that was not previously given to them. The break away from stereotypes and broad group meanings has given many consumers, that felt underrepresented, the opportunity, awareness, and power to create spaces for themselves that may have not previously existed. This results in a shift of power from the brand to the consumer, that has been supported by the research done throughout this thesis. In the creation of the "portrait of the modern day consumer" it was realized that consumers are flooded with brand options and more information everyday making them aware of company motives if researched and thus more willing to shift their brand loyalties. In the survey that was conducted, many participants either stated that they were aware and responsive to companies social campaigns, or that they at least wanted to be, indicating a switch to a more consciously aware and information-seeking consumer, which was predicted in the "portrait of the modern day consumer" (**Appendix D**).

The development of cultural hybridization and its effect on the theory of consumer culture needs to be taken into account by marketers. Marketers need to adapt to the borderless, dynamic, and ever-changing nature of consumers and be able to keep up with their demands. Thus, strategies such as collaborations and other interpretive and quick marketing tools can aid brands marketing teams in being able to listen to their consumers and be both reactive and proactive. Being able to react and interact with consumer concerns, questions, or feelings allows a brand to strengthen and maintain brand image and community and encourage loyalty with its consumers. The ability to forecast trends, whether they be stylistic or regarding social movements, can establish a brand ahead of its competitors if they are able to act upon it this can be done through listening to consumers in the brand community - if the brand has established a strong and effective community around their brand.

Another way for brands to influence consumers is through the use of Social Media. Some brands have already started to create their marketing content with the intent for it to imitate user-generated content (Azemi, Y. & Ozuem, W., 2018). This is a strategy that can be influential in a consumers social media experience and communications with and about the brand. With the understanding of the consumer experience with Social Media, brands in the women's fashion industry can use it as a tool to display their take on trends, for example diversity. Understanding and adapting to the contemporary landscape due to cultural hybridization, is a noteworthy concept for brands to understand in order to better react and interpret what their consumers want with the field of Consumer Culture Theory.

### **3.4.3. Subconclusion**

In conclusion, with the introspective and multi-faceted look into the field of Consumer Culture theory, the primary question of the thesis *“How does consumer culture shape diversity movement's in the women's fashion industry?”* has been answered in the context of the current consumer and social landscape. The findings indicate that the industry is being shaped by consumers and their current demand for inclusivity, brand responsibility towards social and ethical movements, and an overall responsiveness and awareness of consumers and what they want. Taking the time to understand the consumers then allows brands to channel these findings and tailor their marketing mix to address any consumer concerns, needs, or wants, thereby increasing brand value. Currently in the women's fashion industry the beauty standard is not reflective of what the population of the consumer community looks like, but there is vocal consumer demand for it. Due to the power shift in favor of consumers, due to an increase in readily accessible alternatives, now more than ever, brands need to be receptive to and heed consumer demands or risk alienating themselves. This increased risk of irrelevance and being lost in the sheer enormity of the amount of brands in the women's fashion industry, in addition to the consumer demand for diversity, has resulted in an increase in diversity movements. The reward for brands that are willing and able to adapt is now greater than ever, however, the cost of unwillingness and inability are now more detrimental than it has ever been before. Finally, if diversity one day manages to become the industry standard, then need for creating content with the explicit purpose of showing diversity and campaigning for it would no longer be necessary. With fulfilling the consumer demand for diversity, and upholding that demand for as long as expected, the focus of marketing can shift towards emerging trends. Adhering to consumer

culture has shaped diversity movements, and will continue to do so in the women's fashion industry.

## Chapter 4.

### CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The research and analysis that has led to this point creates a conclusive understanding of: *How does consumer culture shape diversity movement's in the women's fashion industry?* It is now time to comprehensively conclude our research, findings, and suggestions in order to obtain a summarical, yet in-depth understanding of the topic. While also looking towards the future of this research and field of study and what this entails for the women's fashion industry.

The final section consists of the following topics:

4.1. Conclusion

4.2. Further Research



## 4.1. Conclusion

This thesis has been concerned with the field of the current diversity movements in the women's fashion industry. This issue becomes abundantly clear when looking at the current state of global affairs. Social movements are gaining momentum and initiating more change as they take off. Political and social endeavors are now a large part of the global sphere of conversation taking place. This increased awareness and concern for social responsibility by consumers and intolerance of ignorance has called forth a period in marketing in the women's fashion industry that calls for sensitivity and reactivity.

Globalization needs to be taken into consideration in order to truly understand the current state of affairs for consumers, marketing, identity, and most components that affect the women's fashion industry is. Online culture and technology further spreads the effects of globalization by creating easier and faster forms of communication that help eradicate physical boundaries and promote a dynamic marketplace. However, this increased ease in communication and removal of boundaries has led to a more complicated understanding of identity and, thus, consumers have become a more intricate subject.

This societal and consumer change means that the women's fashion industry is now being subjugated to all that it entails. The current beauty standard in the industry calls for tall, young, light-haired, fair-skinned, and thin females. This highly stylized, selective, and alienating standard is now being not only called into question but rejected by some consumers, the current standard of beauty is no longer being tolerated and change is being demanded. Observing the current state of affairs, globalization, and the changing consumers in respect to the women's fashion industry it became apparent that there was a link between diversity movements and the industry. Not only is there correlation between consumer demands and what that means for the industry, but it also begs the question how much has already changed and how far is there left to go?

The involvement of consumers and brands roles with the movements in the industry were taken into consideration to understand the different actors participating in the market and their influence. In order to accomplish this a primary question and three subsequent questions were formulated, explored and evaluated. The primary question is:

*How does consumer culture shape diversity movements in the woman's fashion industry?*

The following are the three subsequent questions explored in this thesis:

- 1) *What is the current concept of consumer identity and how could that be affecting diversity?*
- 2) *In regards to diversity in the women's fashion industry, what are the consumer perspectives?*
- 3) *How can brands in the women's fashion industry embrace diversity?*

In regards to the current state of the women's fashion industry and diversity movements we began to wonder, how far have we come, and how far do we have left go? The purpose of this thought was to better understand what has happened, what is happening, and what is going to happen to the industry. The subsequent question 1 and 2 explored and analyzed the current state of the women's fashion industry, with a focus on consumers, providing insight into how far we have come and a vision of what the future will look like. The third delves deeper into how far is left to go for marketing in brands to accommodate and keep up with this new world of consumers in the women's fashion industry.

Subsequent question 1 explored the issue of understanding consumers with the question: *What is the current concept of consumer identity and how could that be affecting diversity?* and found that the idea of what a consumer looks like has changed and is changing rapidly. This development comes as a result of globalization, cultural hybridization, the shift in brand communities, the progression of the approach to communication, the intricacies of identity, and the increasing reliance on digital platforms creating a new notion of what the modern day consumer has come to be. With these developments, identity diversity has become a prevalent force in consumer identity for marketers to pay attention to. Consumers have come to be digitally-inclined and multi-faceted power players in the relationship between brand and consumer. This exchange of power into the hands of consumers implies that marketers, in this climate, need to be listening to and understanding to consumer demands. With consumers becoming increasingly ethically and socially-minded in terms of purchasing decisions, marketers are responding to emerging trends, such as diversity. The willingness to listen and reactory behavior displayed by marketers indicates a beginning point for inclusivity in the women's fashion industry.

Subsequent question 2 created an opportunity to better understand consumer perspectives on diversity in the women's fashion industry, and looks at how the respondents filled the role of the modern day consumer. The respondents answers to the survey supported the aspects of the "portrait of the modern day consumer" formulated in section 3.1.6., regarding diversity in the women's fashion industry. The proposal that consumers are now more digitally focused and active is confirmed by respondents stating that their sources of fashion inspiration were Instragram, online magazines, and online stores among other digital sources. The disregard for brand loyalty, which is indicative of the power shift in favor of the consumers was supported by the respondents claiming that particular characteristics of a brand would be able to influence their purchasing decisions. This shows a loss of power for brands who now have to put more effort into making their brand and product more enticing for consumers to interact with. With the increase in consumer awareness of diversity in the women's fashion industry, whether it be the presence of it or lack thereof, emphasizes the ever-changing and dynamic state of the consumer. The responses to the survey serve as evidence that consumers are becoming increasingly complex and the newfound challenge that poses to brands attempting to understand and interact with them.

Subsequent question 3 looked more closely into the concept of diversity and Consumer Culture Theory, allowing for an understanding so that initiatives could be created and suggested for marketing uses. It has now been suggested and proven multiple times throughout this thesis that consumers are aware and concerned with social issues and that their interest affects consumer demand in the marketplace, and that brands need to react accordingly to remain relevant. High-street brands are especially susceptible to general consumer demands, due to the fact that they have diverse, broad, and large target groups. As found in our research these demands are difficult to generalize for global purposes as seen in the findings regarding a Danish society seeking out more body inclusivity due to the fact that body shape was the main source of underrepresentation in regards to their appearance rather than diversity in other forms (can be seen in **Appendix C**). This means that high-street brands have to take a myriad of individual consumer demands into account with everything they do. Making it more difficult to adhere to all the separate demands, not only do they need to reach a broad audience but also maintain an affordable price on their products. Due to the large size of a high-street brand in terms of employees, value chain, and almost every aspect of company life, implicating any change is a large and arduous process. The size, complexity, and broad consumer base of high-street brands poses challenges that needed to be taken into consideration with any

marketing related strategies that we suggested for the premise of subsequent question 3. of this thesis.

With taking the challenges that high-street brands face into account, one direction that brands can choose to take is using collaborations as a marketing tool to elevate consumer awareness of their brand, adhere to current consumer demands, and maintain a brand image that is reflective of the current state of the woman's fashion industry.

Alongside marketing strategy suggestions, much like the use of collaborations, further considerations that brands should have when attempting to solve the question of section 3.3., *"How can brands in the women's fashion industry embrace diversity?"*, can be further understood through the applied theoretical lense of the section. An important factor of consideration is Schau, Muniz, and Arnould's understanding of how to create value in brand communities. Their insight into the consumer brand relationship creates a strategy of how to analyze any potential marketing tools and begin to understand the effect they will have, by showing how to build collective value-creation for the benefit of the brand. Integrated Marketing Communication strategies can aid marketers in how to communicate to the consumers through tools, such as visual rhetoric, social media, and an increased online brand presence. Increasing the amount and quality of communication between not only brand and consumer, but also between consumers themselves, can aid in building a stronger brand community. Building and enhancing brand communities is a substantial strategy that can be used to increase brand awareness, encourage consumer loyalty, and to create a stronger hold in the marketplace. The women's fashion industry is built upon the idea of brands, thus brand communities are an important tool in being able to successfully take part in the industry. The theoretical lenses that applied to the marketing tools and strategies of subsequent question 3, if used appropriately are able to help a brand create and maintain strong brand image, brand community, and to minimize the distance between consumer and brand. Through understanding the current trend of consumer demand for diversity and integrating suitable strategies accordingly, brands can begin to promote a diversity-minded profile.

The primary question of this thesis *"How does consumer culture shape diversity movement's in the women's fashion industry?"* calls into account the answers to the three subsequent questions and expands upon them in order to provide a complete and comprehensive insight into the field of diversity in the women's fashion industry. Additionally, we

have been investigating the nature of Consumer Culture theory in an in-depth manner of the current social and consumer landscape. Through the analysis of the three subsequent questions, the findings demonstrate that the women's fashion industry is increasingly being influenced by the wants and needs of consumers and their demand for diversity, their consideration for social and ethical movements by brands, and thus brands need to have a better understanding of consumers wants and reactions to them. Brand value can be increased with the adjustment of a brands marketing mix to the aforementioned consumer demands. It has been made abundantly clear throughout the thesis that the current standard of beauty in the women's fashion industry is not at all an accurate reflection indicative of what consumers actually look like, leading to the demand for realistic representation. With the shift of power giving consumers more control, there is an increasing pressure on brands to be receptive to consumer demands or face the consequences. The increase in diversity movements are a result of the increased risk brands face of getting lost in the noise or replaced in the vast world of brands in the women's fashion industry, if they do not react to the explicit consumer demand for inclusivity. The cost of not conforming to consumer demands is higher than ever, conversely the rewards for being willing and able to adapt to consumers presents brands with the great opportunity. Complying with the findings that consumer culture is shaping diversity movements and affecting women's fashion industry, this trend shows no signs of slowing down and should continue to carry out this effect. If brands are able to fulfill and do the work required of them in regards to listening to and understanding consumer demands, then the knowledge derived from this thesis can go beyond diversity movements, and can be applied to other emerging trends. If the research strategy for this thesis is imitated for the applicable consumer group of that particular trend, then the findings can be applied.

## 4.2. Further Research

This thesis has primarily looked at the changing market landscape in the women's fashion industry from the perspective of the consumers and from this creating a research method. However, this perspective and look at the diversity movements and how consumers are changing consumers from the perspective of brands would be an interesting addition to the research gathered for this thesis.

Another look in this field could be to delve into the internal workings of brands and companies. This could be used to attempt to understand the connection between internal workings and what is produced for external purposes. Through comparison of internal and external resources, research could begin to look at if there is a correlation between the two.

The research method that resulted from this research can be used beyond the scope of the aforementioned diversity movements in the women's fashion industry. Diversity is discussed as a trend within the thesis meaning that the research method could be applied to other trends that are present or emerge. Not only could it be used with different trends, but also with different industries. Research would need to be conducted on the industry in order to understand and apply the research method, but it can be used as a tool for brands to understand the evolving consumer and how to adapt to them.

Further research for future use of the findings and research method would be to update the theory based on what will be current technology and its effect on communication style. A large aspect of this thesis was researching current technology and the way people communicate because of it and from that the advanced consumer understanding was created. As the research done for this thesis also showed, the rapid pace of technology advances and the quick adoption of new communication methods by consumers means that context needs to be taken into consideration alongside the research method.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A



*A Victoria's Secret ad that was run in print and online that depicts a very singular vision of what the perfect body for women is.*



*A shot from the Nanushka's spring 2019 show that consists of models that fit the stereotypical european "look" with little diversity.*



*On the left is a photoshopped image that was used in print and web publications, on the right is the untouched image showing the severity of the photoshopping.*



## Appendix B



*Ashley Graham as the first plus-sized model that has been featured on the cover of Vogue.*



*Halima Aden as the first Hijab wearing woman featured on the cover of Vogue.*



*Lauren Wasser, a model with a prosthetic leg, walks the runway in a fashion show.*



*Andreja Pejic, a transgender woman posing in a fashion advertisement.*



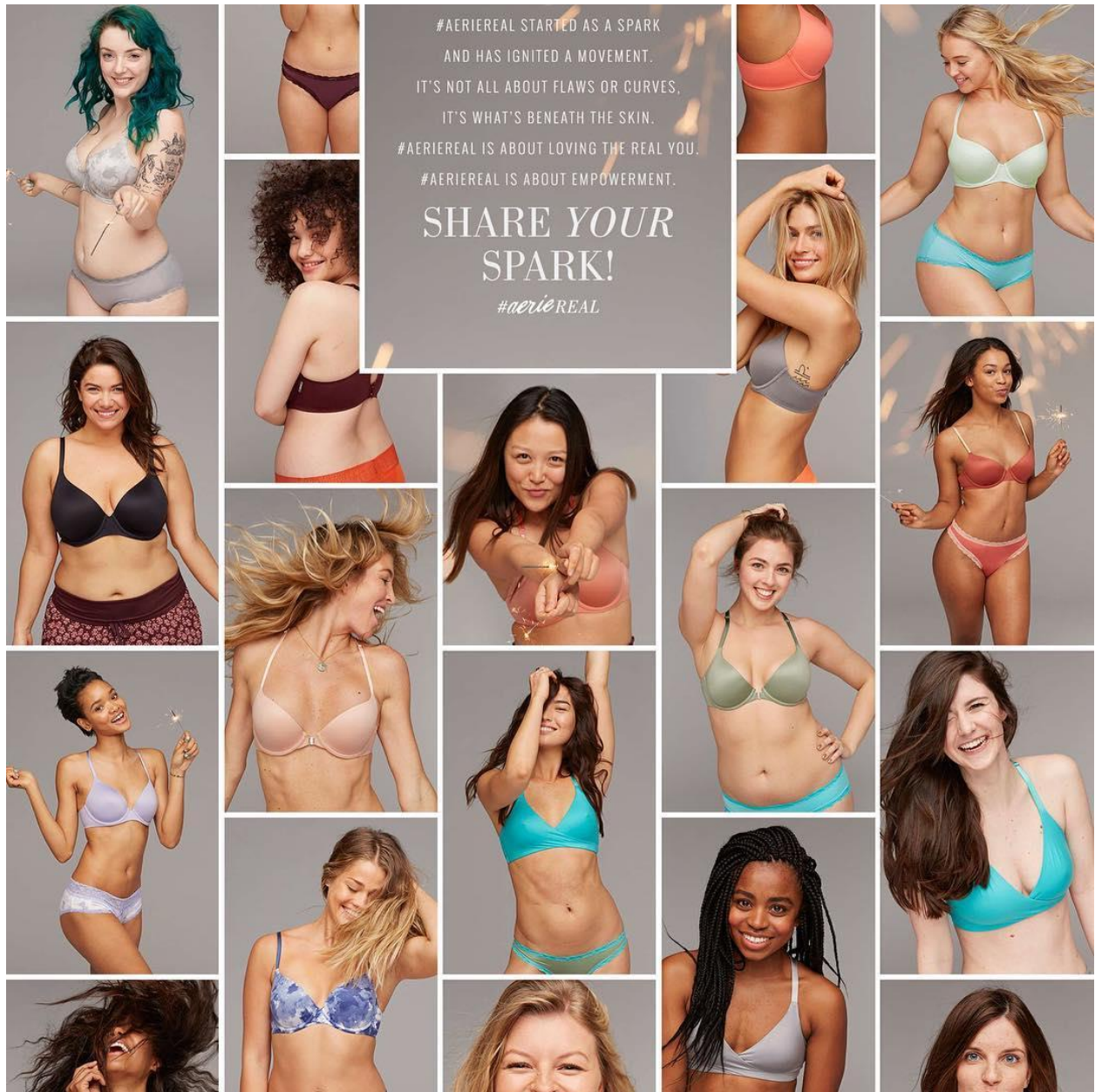
*Gillean McLeod, modeling in a fashion swimsuit advertisement for H&M.*



*An undisclosed model posing for an underwear advertisement with body modifications being made.*

## Appendix C





*An ad run by American Eagle featuring no body modifications, and actively promoting the brand to be used for body positivity.*

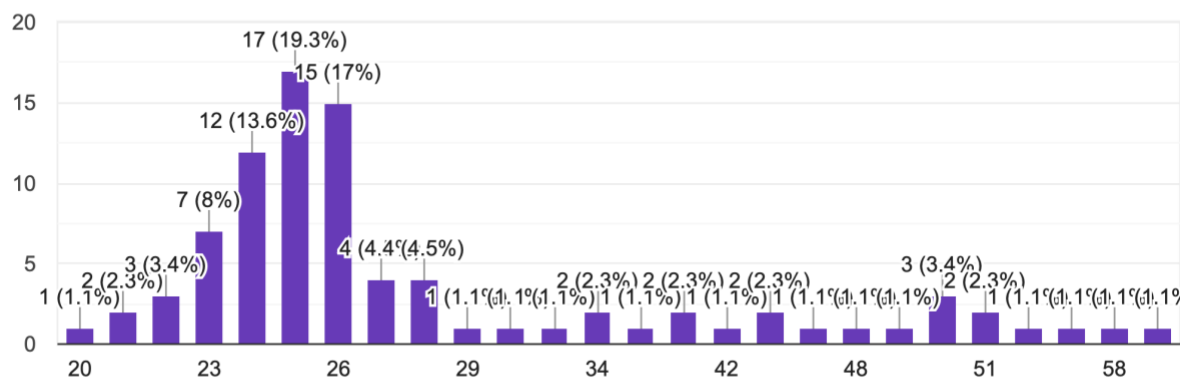
## Appendix D

*Below is the answers to the survey that was presented within this thesis. The information is from the participants of the results and was collected anonymously. It is presented in charted format for questions that did not require short or long answer questions. The short and long answer question responses will be shown as they were written in the survey by the participants.*

### About You?

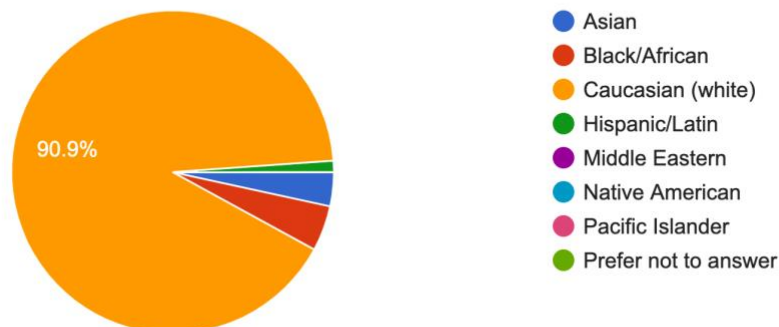
#### What is your age?

88 responses



#### What is your ethnicity?

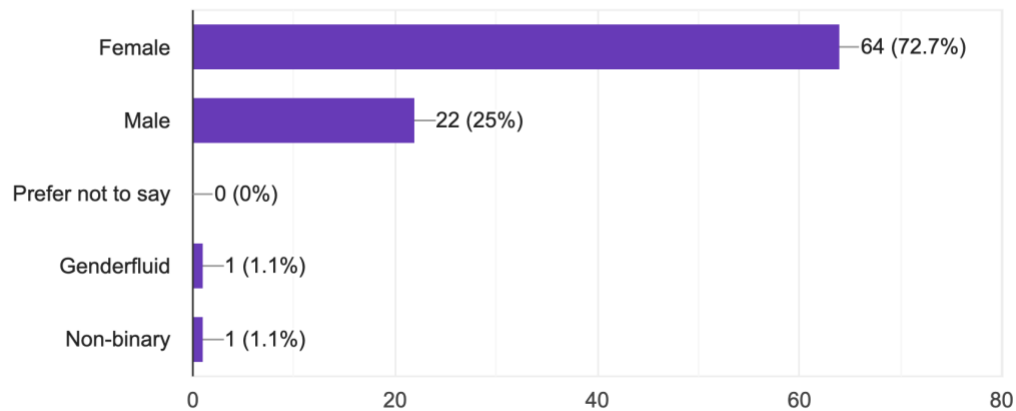
88 responses





## What gender do you identify with?

88 responses



### If you answered "other" to the previous question, please elaborate.

I don't identify as either boy or girl

I am non-binary. Primarily male but born as a female and at the moment femme-presenting and happy with that. I may at some point later in life transition to male or male-presenting if I feel the need for it. I love being a woman, but would prefer to be a man, though I cannot be bothered with the hassle of transitioning at present. I could probably also be classified as a bit genderfluid.

### Where do you find your fashion inspiration? (instagram, friends, tv, etc.)

Instagram, friends, blogs, pinterest

Looking at people around me.

Instagram

My surroundings

Instagram, webshops, magazines

Insta, magazines, on the street

Wardrobe

I don't find inspiration - not by intention

friends, instagram

Instagram, streets, TV, friends

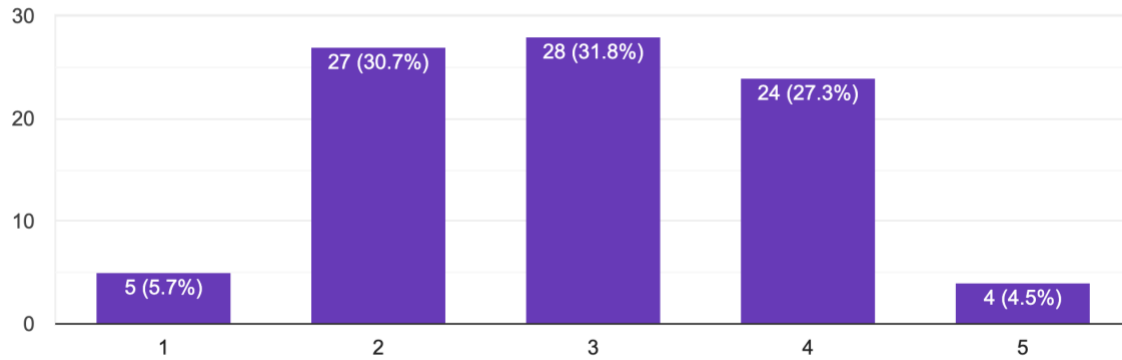
Other people
Online
Magazines, instagram, real life
Work
Instagram
Instagram, Pinterest
Instagram, friends, facebook, tv
Instagram
Friends
Stylish friends, tumblr, pinterest, movies, online magazines, blogs, instagram
My surroundings, friends, instragram, magasines, movies, series etc.
Movies. Friends. Instagram.
instagram, friends, direct emails from fashion brands
magazines, the streets, IG, art
Magasines, instagram, websites
friends, online, magazines
Instagram, youtube (fashion shows) & history
Mostly in the city and by looking at friends, Instagram as well
Dont really care for fashion, but I guess I do get inspired by peers and what I accidentally see on eg SoMe
From fashion elements to which I can identify with
Friends, fashion brands, Instagram
moms old wardrobe, tv and instagram
My mind.
Instagram mostly
Instagram, pinterest, friends
Friends, magazines, the street
Tumblr, Instagram, music videos
Instagram
friends and shops

Friends
instagram
Instagram, and friends
Friends, Instagram, Tumblr, Tv-shows
Pinterest, Etsy, Instagram, google search
Friends, instagram
Insta, friends, in the streets, stores
People around me
mom, friends, instagram, commercials,
Instagram, blogs, magazines, friends
Instagram and friends
Instagram, work
Friends
Magazine and the internet
Instagram, facebook
Tv
On the streets.
Instagram
Instagram, magazines, friends and in stores.
Instagram, in art, and on the street
company websites
Instagram, friends, TV
Instagram
Instagram
Runway, tv, Instagram, friends, designers etc.
Instagram, Costume Magasin,
People on the street, Instagram, web shops and normal shops
Instagram, emails.
Friends, social media and In the public setting In general

instagram, magasins, bloggers
Sometimes TV and film, i guess. Other than that, I get inspired when I go online shopping.
Instagram, blogs, stores
Instagram and visiting shops
Magazines, street, friends, what I were wearing last year
Streets, Instagram, movies
Friends and coworkers
Tv, magasins
Friends, tv
On the streets, in magazines
Friends, shops
Your mother
Pinterest
Shops and Euroman
Instagram
Instagram and YouTube
Instagram, Fashion Forum, magazines etc.
Instagram
Television, friends
Instagram, Window shopping

## How important is fashion to you personally?

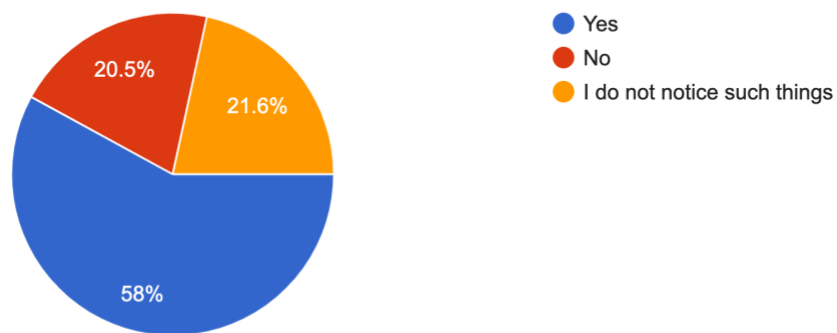
88 responses



## Diversity in the Women's Fashion Industry

### Have you noticed diversity in connection to woman's fashion before this survey?

88 responses



**If you answered "yes" please elaborate below**

commercials, magazines, news

I Saw A interesting program about it om tv. And I've startet to se it A little in comersials.

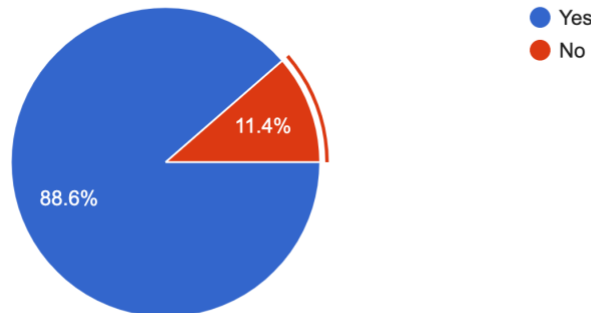
You see more and more diversity. Such as plus size models, religious models etc.
More focus on plus size, race
I don't know, weird question
Ads with several races and disabilities and sizes included
Men, women, lgbt people, different races (not many asian though)
Not sure about this question
Yes! There has become much more focus on this! Dove and so on. Also especially in the lingerie industry it is changing, in my opinion.
I always try to spot diversity in marketing of fashion brands.
Diversity in the sense that it has become a buzzword i the fashion industry. Progressive media, often comment on fashion shows in the context of diversity. Old venerated brands are often confronted with past work og bad practices.
Today diversity is a larger issue, and many brands make sure to show this, but the Danish market does not show much diversity, it is mostly international brands like H&M
I follow quite a few 'alternative' models, designers and the like (read disabled, transgender, non-caucasians, plus-size, etc.) on social media, as I wish to support their representation in media. I am, however, aware that they comprise a minority.
Mostly with regard to body type and size. I often see clothes I would like and then realise that it probably wouldn't look good on me because I look nothing like the tall, slim models
depending on situations i think we tend to dress differently. I live in copenhagen where I can dress with extreme colors and be more experimental with my choices - but i work in Kalundborg, where the "dress code" (there id no official) is more conservetive. So I tend to dress down when working
Especially with small brands
Diversity in terms of not all women sides are presented and not enough is considered. The basic sides and promotion photos do not represent shorter women, big women and pregnant woman
Everything is in style right now! Being sleek and classy, the normcore-look, Scandinavia-simplicity, 90's, the practical cargo look
Some brands do promote diversity (i.e. Dove as far as I remember)
I've been aware of it in the sense that I have always felt it was slightly monotone and could benefit from more diversity.
Because I am looking for it I find a bit more diversity now than 5 years ago (still just a tiny drop in the ocean)
Make question more clear; define what diversity means
Luckuly we see a bit more diversity now e.g. in ads
There are more unisex fashion trends, more sizes / sizes that fit all, cuts that work for most people, etc.

commercials for benneton and hm with diversity in caucasian, asian, african and latin models
In many adds
Certain ads that is a diverse group of modelsFor example
Most models and clothing are geared to fit one type
I've noticed diversity in terms of sizing - company's aiming to broaden their size range. In terms of racial diversity though I haven't noticed a big shift.
I think theres is more focus on diversity in the fashion industry now then there was 5 years ago. I still think we could work more on the diversity by showing even more different ethnicities and also more curvy sized women.
I believe I've seen several examples of companies attempting to incorporate diversity into their general presentation - although the industry definitely tends to focus on caucasian men and women with a particular physical appearance
The topic has been brought to my attention by some companies initiatives to increase diversity in their advertisements.
Specially about body type
I have noticed the shift from skeleton looking models, towards plus size models.
thankfully, the fashion industry is becoming better at casting models - models that gives a better picture of the diversity in the world.
I still think that Caucasian women are most presented, but i do see other ethnicities here and there.
An increase in diversity among the looks of models is growing. At the same time it seems to be trending. I mention this as i believe it is too important to pay attention to the development that supporting diversity is a growing trend that moves much faster than the global support of ethnicity to compare. Social Capital is connected to the embrace of diversity, which i believe is a key driver alting with other types of "more substantial" tensions that also drives the increase in openness towards as well as attention to diversity. These movements are applicable to the development in the fashion Industry, but not exclusively as it is also evident in other industries and describes the more general mentality.
Benneton adds come to mind, but I haven't noticed that the french brands I like to be big on diversity.
Doves adverts for example. Press coverage on the subject
When you see television and magasin
To thin and too yung girls
There is something for everyone usually
Yes, if you think about the diversity in the different sub cultures people identify themselves with
Especially diversity in ethnic women, religion and cultures. Also invironment (geographic) and I notice a different taste and creativity with fashion, based of segments of higher and lower educated females and families (social status)

I noticed that fashion is very individual from personality to personality and many people use fashion to express who they are

In regards to the ethnicity you identified as in a previous question, do you think there is enough representation of your ethnic group in woman's fashion?

88 responses



Does a company's choice to display diversity or lack of it, influence your decision to purchase? Why/why not?
yes, it tells me something about their ability to include minorities and acknowledge their existence
Yes. I like to buy where diversity in age, race and size is shown. I don't like the look of clearly anorectic girls.
Yes, diversity will enhance fashion since it can bring out new trends and new perspective to the industry
No it doesnt
Hmm... i do not think so as I am caucasian and that is Allahs displayed. But I do Think it is cool when company's display diversity. However, it does not affect me if they do not show diversity.
Sometimes, I like it when it's very inclusive
So, the question is whether a company displays models and/or clothes for people that are, e.g. fat, black, gay, short, and if this affects my decision to purchase? Sure. The models never have the same dad-bod as I do. For this reason, all the "skinny" jeans are disregarded instantly. More interestingly, the category "plus size" does not linguistically intrigue my sense of self. The Danish brand "Big Robert" is another example that plays on the self-identity of being "plus (plus) size"
For me i doesnt matter. If i like the cloth I will buy it; no mattet the diversity or models ethnicity
No. I havent really thought about it but this may depend on my own ethnicity, most of the models especially in Nordics are still white. I think there should be more diversity in fashion tho.
No.



Maybe
Yes, I prefer when more varieties of people are included
Yes. It says something about company values, that you want to relate to.
No unfortunately not
To me, it makes a brand much more interesting when showing diversity. It catches the attention. Maybe because its still "rare". When Zara used an older woman (60's) on their website, my first thought was "wow, cool!".
It does because I want to feel that the brand creates for everyone and does not favor only one or two types.
Not at all. I tend to look for body types/ethnicities that my own
No. I don't really Care much for the models. I only look at Instagram where bloggers and influencers tag some clothes and then I buy it. I love fashion, but I hate the fashion industry, because I can't relate to the look of any model even though we're both white..
I don't really pay attention to companys advertising.
<p>When considering my favorite brands and preferred places to shop, a broad representation of minorities doesnt come to mind. Even though i consider myself all for diversifying and representing all groups in fashion, it doesnt bother me.</p> <p>My favorite brands being somewhat work wear and military related, professions traditionally dominated by men, white in my part of the world ( northern europe), i am not surprised when white men are primarily represented within these brands.</p> <p>If i do imagine a brand such as carhartt, shifting their brand identity from what theyve been doing for 100 years, it probably wouldnt be a problem for me. That being as long as they doesnt leave behind their original brand completely.</p> <p>Obviously, companies who uphold malicious practices should be held accountable. but i am not sure having a lack of diversity in itself is a malicious practice. Of course, if your target customer falls within multiple categories, there might be good reason to represent these on the catwalk, in editorials, etc. But if your brand ( for many companies, the only thing justifying the prices ), is about selling a singular vision, with a very specific representation, i think companies should be able to do so.</p>
Yes, because if I dont feel like my bodytype is represented i cannot see a reason to spend time on purchasing their clothes.
Yes. If they are unwilling to use diverse models, then I honestly cannot help but assume that they are e.g. ageist, ableist, racist or the like. Take Karl Lagerfeld or Victorias Secret as examples. Lagerfeld didn't want big people to wear his clothes and Victoria's Secret didn't want transgendered models. If they will not be inclusive they do not deserve my money. This is so, as they are not actively working towards making the world a better place, as is the responsibility of everyone; especially companies and people with means and influence. Also, if they don't want people of my demographic (plus-size and non-binary) then I cannot imagine they'd actually made anything that would comfortably fit me, and I refuse to be uncomfortable. Even in the case of beauty.

Regarding my ethnicity, no. I'm Caucasian which tends to be the norm in advertising, so I'm neither put off nor persuaded by that, I just buy what I like (or what fits my figure). I do think I have a tendency to purchase clothes when the model looks more like me in terms of skin-tone and hair colour, purely just because then I can gauge how that item will look on my skin colour. Having said that, the ethnicity of the model would never deter me from buying clothing that I like, in fact, I'd be more likely to support an ethnically diverse brand.
However, regarding body type, I'm definitely influenced. As I mentioned earlier, I often don't make a purchase because I think the clothes won't fit my body type the way it fits the model in the picture. Also, I find a lot of Danish brands don't cater to different sizes outside of the normal figure typical of DK (very tall & slim), so when buying pants, for example, I often find that getting a larger size means an increase in pant leg length, something I don't need. I'm put off purchasing from these companies because I end up being disappointed. I feel like these brands don't want to cater to a different body type, hence why all their models look so "danish"- if they were a little more diverse in body type (and sizing to go with it) I would be more inclined to purchase.
no
Not really. If a company does not have close that fits I will not buy from them
Yes absolutely. But not do much the choice of the company as the culture within the company
No. Diversity has become political word used by people who doesn't know or are afraid of themselves or other. For me fashion is only about how I feel, how I want people to see me and expressing a story.
Don't know
No
I would choose clothing items from a retailer who is not virtue signalling SJW buzzwords like "diversity"
It makes me sympathize more with the brand. But it hasn't influenced my buying choices
Yes. For instance, Zara did not make bigger sizes than L before which made me not want to shop there with friends of bigger size -but now (in some countries) they make XXL
No
No, for menswear it's not as relevant as for women in my opinion. And since I'm buying menswear it has no effect
No. But most ad's I see, are with white women, so I've never considered it
No. I focus on quality and design. A high price is actually also a parameter (high price=high quality)
Yes, I tend to prefer brands that choose to be inclusive and showcase diversity.
Nej det ligger jeg ikke mærke til
I prefer companies that try to adapt to various body types and sizes, it makes me feel more 'normal'
No

x
It doesn't affect me personally, as I don't notice how much diversity representation there are. I do think however that they everyone should be represented.
Not really. Only if it's publicly known they are against some ethnicities.
Definitely. I consider lack of diversity superficial and "out of fashion" - automatically, my eyes are pointed elsewhere. I find no inspiration in perfect measures
No; is this referring to diversity of ethnicity?
Not in the purchase situation, it's more likely influencing me in the initial phase of the buying cycle
I don't usually take that into consideration when buying
I like it, but I look more at the clothes than the models
I wouldn't say No
No, it will get me to check out the brand initially but not necessarily be the road block to purchase
More diversity probably helps, but normally I don't think much about it
Yes it could if I don't agree with the reasonings behind a company's choice and intent in lacking diversity
No
?
No (sorry)
For me, it is hard to tell apart diversity within the style of clothing. Thus, my purchase intentions mainly depend on whether a piece of clothing is in line with my style, without being able to further define this style. However, I think that a lack of diversity in a firm's marketing will negatively influence my decision to purchase.
No, because I don't read into the background of the company I buy from. I buy styles I like without thinking any further about how or from whom it was made.
Honestly, It's not something I think of as much as I want. If I see something I like - I normally buy it - no matter which company it comes from and how much the company chooses to display diversity.
definitely YES
I don't think so - I would like to choose brands based on their ability to incorporate diversity but if I'm being honest I probably don't think enough about it / pay enough attention to it
No, not attached to any company. Just buy as I please.
Ikke rigtig - kan jeg lide det butikken har at tilbyde og er jeg interesseret i at købe noget, tænker jeg ikke ikke over om den viser mangfoldighed eller ej.
No, because I more often than not forget to think about the issue.

Yes. If they for example use a plus size model for their campaign I have deep respect for the company and will look more into their collection.
No I dont really notice the companies choise of diversity unless it is different from the white, skinny model look, which often is represented.
No
Honestly i have not thought about it.
No, i do notice the ethnicity of the models, But my main focus is on the product
yes it does. fashion brands have a big influence on society - fashion therefore needs to be frontrunner when it comes to showing everyone whats right from wrong - and it is wrong to not be considered good enough because of the color of your skin or the size of your clothes.
No, it does not. I first and foremost look at the clothes. And if I like it, I buy it.
Not exclusively in either way but i like that the Industry has a sider focus. Most importantly I like when brands represent themselves in ways that are actually representative of their values, customers etc. Not just being dictated to apply a certain face of whatever the norm tells to.
I am not sure. The french brands I buy mainly seem to use caucasians - or maybe I just seem to notice them more(?!?). But consciously it does not influence my decision on whether to purchase or not.
No. Does not consider it that important.
No
No, because when I finally bye something og it is just because I walked past it and saw it in the window
No
Don't care
My purchases is spontaniously
no, I dont know why
No. It's overthinking the problem I don't see race color or gender
No, I'm more influenced by what I like or need.
No. Just dont care
Yes
No, because it's not about other people. It's about what I think looks good on me
It definitely does. Since I have varying taste in clothing based of mood, season and trends, I like to purchase my clothing and accessories, in shops that offers a number of different styles. Also because it therefore is reaching out to a much broader audience (and me :))
No. Because is really expensive all the fashion clothes

No, not all. Sometimes i get an idea from shops or other people, how to put clothes together -  
Othervise i will see what i have in the closet i Can use.

I stay away from brands that just cater to a certain bodytype

**Do you consider certain characteristics about a brand before purchasing from them?  
(sustainability ethics, models they use, I don't consider, etc.)**

yes, their ethical stance in many aspects is important to me but its often rather opaque

I wish I did.

Sustainability

I don't consider

I consider if the brand is thinking of sustainability and environment, but not much

Sustainability !!!

I do not really consider it actively or consciously. For instance, being a student, I often do online shopping at ASOS. I have no idea on their sustainability ethics or CSR in general. I do, however, note the descriptions of clothes, e.g. "skinny jeans". I have no fucking idea what "skinny jeans" means. Do I have to be skinny? Or do they just plaster to my body like yoga pants on a hippo? The amount of "skinny jeans" available in comparison to "regular jeans" is quite astonishing and repulses me actively. Even when big brands go about their body positivity and uses "plus size models" we antagonise and re-iterate the "plus size" body. I suppose it is no different from noting the black body occupying white space (See Fanon, 1986).

No i dont

sustainability / ethics mostly

Not really

Maybe

Sometimes but not always

Yes. Sustainability and ethic standards are important

Sometimes

For me, it is all about the branding of their product.

Models they use especially.

Not at all.

I like more sporty brands, and I love ASOS where I don't look at the brand I'm buying. If I like the things I find on ASOS I will buy it no matter what brand.

Only how it fits

Yes, i like to consider myself a hesitant buyer. Sustainability comes to mind i various ways; will this products serve me for a long time? was this made in natural fabrics? Regarding models, if an, in my case, inspiring man is related to a brand, i naturally become inclined to buy into the brand. Im also a sucker for heritage, and percieved originality; if someone was the first to use x kind of fabric or x kind of pattern, i hold this brand and products to a higher esteem than late adopters of said technology or material.
Sustainable production, cosideration to different bodytypes.
Yes. I consider what they represent amd what they are attempting to donin this world (re: above answer). I'm also considerate of the environmental impact of fashion and what they are doing to limit the unfortunate effects of their productions. However, i must admit that as I am not at pressent very affluet and plus-size, I sometimes have to make concessions to my principles, as sustainable fashion tends to be more expensive and the plus-size selections are very limited, if you don't want to look like a tent. (Apparently we are supposed to want to hide our shapes <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ♀)
I mostly consider if the clothes will suit my body type, which I suppose I base off of the size of the model and how the clothes look on her. Then I might also consider how sustainable the clothes are, but this is not a huge factor in my purchasing decision.
Yes, but none of what you just mentioned, more the aesthetics of the brand.
If the models look like they have eating disorders I would not buy the brand
i dont consider
I buy clothing because I fall in love with it. Sustainability can be a plus, but I don't would never buy for that sole reason. I think it's more sustainable to buy good clothing, that can last longer.
Yes, to some extend. Mostly ethics or sustainability. I avoid some brands that has a bad rep., but if don't know their policy I probably won't investigate it before buying
Look, price, sometimes sustainability
Principally, I stay away from SJW brands. I think the diversity issue is fake and ridiculous
Sustainability, language and look
Sustainability is important which is why I prefer vintage shops and second hand and brands like Levi's that are known for being sustainable.
No
Not really, maybe models a little bit. But I'm mainly focused on the collections and the clothes
Models, their use of Photoshop, how wearable the clothes is, reviews
No
Sustainability and their core statements are usually the most important, as it reflects on whether a company is willing to pursue a diverse and sustainable future.
Yes
I notice if they use models that look normal in size ie. not anoretic

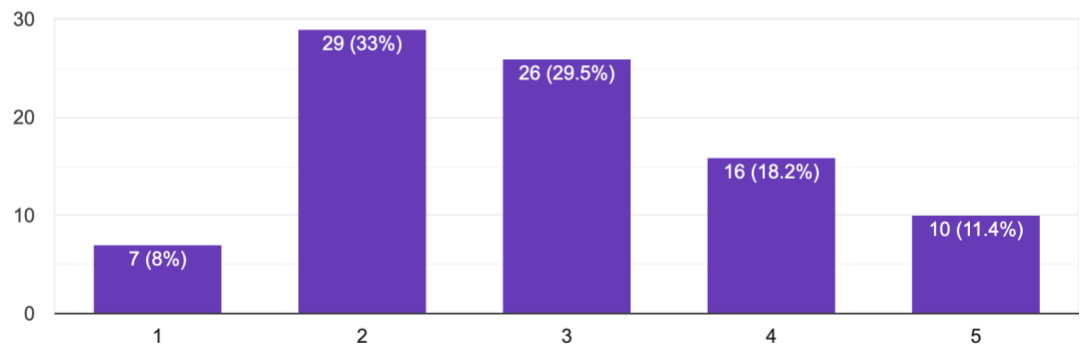
Yes
x
Yes, I value sustainability and ethical values.
No.
Absolutely, but not every time I purchase sth.
Reputation, ethics
Yes, sustainability mainly
Sustainability and ethics
sustainability, eco, work ethics
Sustainability
Same as before, it willGet me to check out the brand but has little power on the actual purchase in many instances
I don't consider that much. But most diversity would probably indicate to me that the brand is better
For some products I do but I don't do extensive research
Yes i Think about sustainability and childwork
?
Sustainability
Yes, sustainability being one of the main consideriderations.
Not really. Unless it is very obvious, that they are an unethical company (eg. uses childwork)
I am trying to be more conscious about sustainability. I bring the same bag (that is not made out of plastic) when I go grocery shopping. As I wrote prevoiusly, I dont consider as much about a brand, that i want to. I often think it is too expensive to buy my clothes and products from a sustainable and organic Company. I want to prioritize buying less but better quality.
100%
sustainability in production can be important to be but mostly I buy clothes without considering this - that is, when I once in a while invest in new clothing which is not often
No.
Nej - igen køber jeg bare det jeg kan lide og falder for.
I lightly consider sustainability and how strongly they choose to edit their model's appearance in photos.
Yes. Specially with the models they those
the companies fur-politic is important to me

I don't consider
I don't consider
I do consider things like ethics and sustainability, But honestly, it rarely affect my purchase, unless its extremely negative
yes - especially sustainability ethics is important.
I can't say that I do. But with some brands, the history of the brand comes into mind. Like adidas.
I more evaluate what their efforts are and can be positivest surprised but i do not put up certain standards and let them dictate my choice.
I don't consider this. The fit, quality and cut is what matters to me.
Yes. Price, quality (high price=high quality), Can I identify wirh the brand?
No
No
No
No
How and where it is made
no
Yes sustainability
Quality of clothing and general business practices
No. Unless they use a starving Coke-head as a front figure
Yes
I care about quality, and of course if it's good for the environment then that's a bonus
Sustainability and climate in general, plays a big role in where I shop. Also I like to shop in stores where it is possible to purchase clothing for plus size women, since I am one, myself.
No
No, i look at every piece of clothes and not the brand.
Sure!



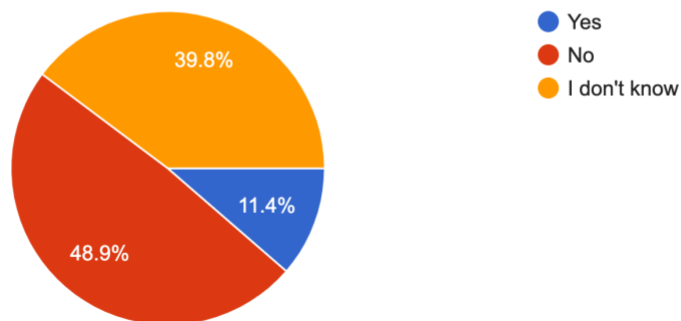
Do you consider yourself loyal to any brands or are you impartial to staying with specific brands?

88 responses



Do you think there is enough diverse representation in the woman's fashion industry?

88 responses



If you answered "yes" or "no", please elaborate on your choice below	
I think more minorities could be exposed more, to create a picture of disabilities etc as more common than it is, to remove a lot of taboos	
There's to much focus still on anorectic looking girls and fotoshop.	
It could be much better	
There could be more	
Many models are still representing one type of beauty	

Still a lot of whit skinny girls
I do not believe there is enough diverse representation in the entire fashion industry. I believe consumers are becoming more and more aware of the impact fashion brands have both environmentally and socially. Therefore brands must take action.
We need more ofc. In my opinion, every women need to consider themselves beautiful. As women, we mirror ourselves very much with the women shown in fashion industry, and use that as an image of how a woman SHOULD look. BC the woman most often used in the fashion industry is skinny, white, tall and out of this world flawless, many women is left with the feeling of being imperfect, as most often, their body type/skin color, and so on is far from similar to this.
Globally, yes - in Denmark, no.
It's fine
<p>The sort of diversity im interested in does differ from what the discourse of diversity is at the moment, but not necessarily opposed to it. I would like to see models or other "bearers" of a brand be of a more engaging sort, with personalities, stories to tell and being more than a body. That might be in the form of someone who has had another life experience that your average white, ablebodied, young male/female, but not by default. I am all for a diversification of beauty and an increase in the representation of minorities. But im not interested in just putting "another kind" of body on the runway if that body remains flat and not engaging.</p> <p>An added note: Fashion thrives on trends, and the danger here is that diversity is just another trend to sell.</p>
Not quite yet, but we're getting there. There is still a lot of acceptance needed from brands to make more of an effort.
Diversity tends to be secluded to a few brands or only something they pay lip service to. A case in point is companies that say they design close for and use models who are plus-size and then defines plus-size as a size 38 and use average sized models. Or who says their clothes are intended to be worn by everyone but then use difficult closing mechanisms that disabled people might not be able to operate. It's fashionable to be inclusive, but many brands still stick to the tested and tried white-skinny-girl-model when it comes down to it.
Too many tall & slim models OR they lean towards the other spectrum with plus size. What about in between? Just a normal curvy body. I can't walk around in crop tops and wrap dresses, it would be nice to just see women with normal figures.
It does not matter if the model is black/white etc. ultimately it is the clothes your are buying, and anyhow it is never going to look the same on you as on them. Again, people do not make a big deal out of what color a mannequin is, which is in many ways similar to a model as it is used to showcase pieces.
I think there is a better choice for women in large sizes
Representation should be dependent on supply and demand. In majority white nations, I see no issue with a majority white representation
There is still a long way to go with both ethnicity and size

I don't see so many African American models or Asian. I mostly see tall blonds which is sad considering how many people in the world are Asian and African American.
Blacks are not represented nearly enough, simple as that. Look as runaways, magazine covers, clothing models. Is it better than 5-10 years ago, probably, because you'll see one black beauty pop up now and then. Not nearly enough though
Too few different ethnicities, now that I think of it
I believe there is a clear lack of diversity, especially looking in magazines, runways and advertising, where it's rare to see people who stand out for their individuality.
Jeg synes der er for meget tøj der ligner hinanden men for lidt der er bæredygtig ( og ikke bare greenwashing)
There isn't enough "plus-size" women.
There is far too much emphasis on a narrow range of fashion. I have trouble finding the clothes I want (often, I have an idea) - that is why I buy it on Etsy or by very small brands
Still a long way to go
More and more you see all types of colors, shapes, body types, hair styles - fashion is moving towards all-inclusive (in my opinion)
There could be more
I think there are measures being taken, but obviously more needs to come
There could always be more diversity so it's hard to say what's enough
Missing different sizes and skincolors
Age
I think you can always improve within this Industry.
No i definitely think diversity can be incorporated much more by most large companies (and probably also most smaller ones)
All I see are the same groups of people.
Most brands still have a clear type of model they use. They may become more diverse in one sense, such as race, but not acknowledge the many other ways in which people are diverse.
You see all over the world there is different cultures and designers have been relating to cultures and using it for inspiration for collections. Also the models. You see a lot of different races on the runway. The thing I miss the most is just normal size women on the runway instead of the ultra skinny ones :)
But not because of ethnicity or gender but because woman fashion is rarely displayed trough normal size woman and this makes me feel bad because I get the feeling I should look like a model and not feel comfortable with what I actually look like.
I Think there are some diversity. i usally dont Think about this, But when asked In a survey like this, i remember seing different ethnic models, But if it is diverse enough, i dont know.
I think it is getting better - but no where near good enough.

I don't seek out advertisements for woman's fashion on a daily basis, but when I stumble upon billboards, I usually see a representation of Caucasian women.
I tend to say no but also lean towards don't no because it depends on of we are regarding this from a biased western stand point. I might think that the fashion Industry should include much more asians in comparison to the amount of asians ik the World. However if you go to asia the picture will be complete turned around. So if the question is "enough diversity in the western fashion Industry" i would say no. It mostly portrays western people and adhere to western ideals.
The fashion industry should show many different variations of gender, skincolour and size
To few real size woman
It's overthinking the problem I don't see race color or gender
There isn't enough representation for different body sizes.
I wish there were more options to plus size women, in luxury brands in general.
There is a lott of brands that offers quantity instead of quality.
I see that it has become more important to use models of All races in womens fashion, But Would Like it to be a less conscious choice and more of a standard. Also in mens please!

<b>Choose three words that you most closely associate with the state of diversity in the woman's fashion industry?</b>
Branding, important, difficult
Race, size, age
Models, beginning, trends
Lacking, biased, evolving
Increasing, still limited and only focus on the Big ethnicities
I don't understand the question
Clueless, ignorant, and indifferent.
??
Developing (diversity), white, limited
On the rise, old-fashioned,
White, skinny, beautiful
Progressing, including and cool
Not sure I understand Q - but could be: Different sex, shape and color
White, skinny, beautiful

Improving, lacking, happening
Developing, increasing, buzzword (brands talks about it, not every brand implements it)
I don't know
Narrow, boring, sad
1 I 2 Don't 3 Know
Trendy, lacking, confusing
developing, changing, positive
Insignificant, insufficient, emerging
conventional, misrepresented, depressing
made up issue.
Sizes, fabrics, availability
there should really be some choices here. i dont know
Multi-cultural, independent & dependent
Unnatural body ideals.
I don't understand this question. The state of diversity?
Hoax virtue signalling
good intentions, confusion, social media influence
Ethnicity, size and gender
Hyped
Pas
White, young, skinny
White, thin, elegance
Monotone, safe (in the sense that the 'diverse' choices are still safe choices), lacking
En bedre løsning, køber generelt kun genbrug da det er det eneste jeg har samvittighed til
Body size, ethnicity, style
I am not interested in woman's fashion
x
Developing, experimental and inclusion
Narrow, non inclusive, Small minded

Unrealistic, colourless, shortlasting
Again, make more clear what diversity means; I.e. race, age, education, thought, gender...
-
evolving, political, undersurface
slow progress, more focus on all shapes and sizes, still most caucasian models
Plain, White and Rich
Minimal, nesscary and increasing
Work in progress
Improving, underrepresented, challenging
Size, color and age
Warm, Big, lighth
I do not associate diversity with fashion
White, skinny, tall
Trending, equality, rights
Different ethnicities, different sizes, different characters.
unisex and colors doesn't own genders anymore
caucasian-'biased', slowly progressing, sales-oriented (i mean not based on genuine intentions to create change but motivated by effect on sales)
Lacking, minimal, obscure
Ensartet til tider..
Minimal, Trivialized, Increasing
Races, cultures and body types
plus size models, transgenders, filipina models
-
Size, body image, unvaried
Pas
...
Rising, Uneven, Conflict
Mixed, shifting ideals, race-fixated
preference, audience, beauty

diverse, thin, thick
Size, skin, gender
Gender, skincoulour and size
Dont know
?
Not existing
good
Not a problem
unequal, diversifying, youthful
Skinny bones angry
Cultural mix, age and looks
Room for everyone
Statements, feminism and lack of tolerance of races (in Denmark)
Idk
Expressions, age, taste
Fumbling trying insecure

## Appendix E

