BEHIND THE GLAMOUR: HOW THE MENTAL ILLNESSES OF FASHION DESIGNERS ARE PORTRAYED THROUGH BRAND AESTHETICS

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Fashion, despite its extravagant beauty and 'glamour and glitz', is an industry that involves much mental and physical stress, often inducing mental illnesses represented by depression. Under the constant competition and the need to show something new, designers often struggle with creativity and originality. It's not surprising, therefore, that designers rank 7th on the long list of 'Jobs with the Most Suicides Per 1000'.

As can be seen from fashion shows and exhibitions, designers are entirely open to much criticism, as the industry is especially hospitable towards novel ideas and hostile to mediocrity and plagiarism. Many fashion designers in this infamous industry have been known to suffer from depression, manic-depressive disorder, and severe anxiety — including Alexander McQueen, L'Wren Scott, and Kate Spade. Because "Opening up personal struggles to the public requires to endure some damage on the brand identity", as Spade's sister said, it is often that instead of revealing symptoms through media, many designers subconsciously express their struggles through clothes and collections.

By focusing mainly on haute-couture and designers' mental illnesses, this paper examines how 'fashion's troubled mind' influences brand aesthetics. Brand aesthetics include the clothes themselves, the brand's visual image, style concepts, advertisements, and the criticisms they receive. Paying special attention to the periods in their lives when they suffered from a mental illness, fashion shows and launched collections are analyzed from an artistic, geometric, and psychological point of view. Theories of fashion will be applied to observe the influence on fashion culture, concentrating on the public and observer-wearer relationships. Street experiments and surveys are conducted to identify whether the average person can also catch out the visual cues signifying traces of mental instability. The conclusion elaborately illustrates how the conditions interfere with artistic expression reflected onto the features of fashion design.

Keywords: Fashion design, Visual branding, Brand aesthetics, Observer-Wearer Relationship, visual cues.

Introduction

Research Background

Fashion in itself is an everflowing type of industry. From a fragmentary point of view, the industry seems to be run by the unique tastes of the head designers of expensive brands like Chanel and Dior, but it's much more than that — the 21st century version of fashion goes beyond rich French designers gossiping

around with high-quality fabrics and unique patterns, but now revolves around many different layers of fashion: haute couture, premium-priced clothing, and lifewear. It's also a trend that more and more consumers previously without much expertise on fashion are gaining more interest in everyday styles and sometimes even introduce new threads of trend into the fashion industry, some fresh things professionals in the area could have never been able to suggest.

This has since pressurized many fashion designers to squeeze out a new genre or taste of fashion that can lure in even the wealthiest and pickiest customers. It is especially the case in the high-fashion industry because there, creating powerful looks isn't just a matter of increasing brand revenue but also a matter of brand pride, designer reputation, and developmental potentials. If one thinks of the era of Gucci before Michele Alessandro became head designer, the essentiality of constructing unique brand images and being able to visually portray them through fresh designs and creative mixing and matching becomes very obvious; Alessandro led Gucci into its next era of genuineness by applying more simple monochromatic leather and expanding its visual trademarks to apply them to a diversity of Gucci products. If it hadn't for Alessandro's pure taste in design and outstanding skill for management, Gucci might not have remained in its seat in the world's list of top haute couture fashion brands, and its recent hit — the ace-embroidered snake sneakers — wouldn't have sold in so many countries.

Likewise, fashion designers all around the world strive everyday to gain attention, mainly by launching unique or collaborative collections and displaying them through fashion shows. However, it is unrealistic for the majority of fashion designers to survive in the competitive market that changes every minute according to what Balmain dress or Prada bag a pop star decides to show off tonight on her Instagram. Many designers naturally get stressed out easily and suffer from many different kinds of mental illnesses, ranging from mild anxiety to severely concerning illnesses like depression and manic-depressive disorder. Not only does this influence the fashion products of the brand, but it also affects brand stability, the general brand image in the eyes of the consumers, because it is the mentality of the brand designer that shows itself onto pieces of fabric as a form of art.

Hence, as a student deeply immersed in the fashion industry and visual branding, an instant curiosity spurred inside of me: Would the different mental illnesses and various sufferings of fashion designers be portrayed onto the products, collections, exhibitions, fashion shows, and the overall brand image? If so, would the visual cues be recognizable, and to what extent would the mental states of the designers influence the marketing strategies and general reputation of the brands during that time period? What would be the aftermath? These basic but questionable aspects of fashion branding inspired me to plan a paper on the issues.

Necessity and Objective of the Study / Research Questions

Although initiated from a small curiosity, this paper will answer many questions covering a wide range of discussable topics on fashion, visual branding, and marketing. Because in this case the mental conditions of the fashion designer becomes a cause; a factor, this study enables readers to think of the authority (not as in a hierarchical company-system but as an overall influencer in the fashion brand) of the designer, in what ways can the fashion designer influence the brand stability, and what factors can affect the operation of the brand itself.

The depression of fashion designers don't just decrease brand reputation and move customers away from becoming consumers of the brand, but sometimes allow insight to new designs and interesting products from the artistic point of view, and oftentimes gather interest from many magazines and fashion manias, influencing perhaps the trend of the fashion market. Though the research question seems specific, it's a great starting point to understand not just the superficial concepts of the industry but also to observe the mobility of the market in-depth. Hence, the effective linkage between the genre of fashion itself, brand operation, and how the fashion industry "flows" and reaches the customers at the end will be what makes this paper worthy of reading. In other words, readers can gain a general understanding of both business, fashion, and perhaps even psychiatry through this interdisciplinary research paper.

Hence to sum up the research questions, the questions will generally be these following, as aforementioned:

Would the different mental illnesses and various sufferings of fashion designers be portrayed onto the products, collections, exhibitions, fashion shows, and the overall brand image?

If so, would the visual cues be recognizable, and to what extent would the mental states of the designers influence the marketing strategies and general reputation of the brands during that time period?

What are notable cases where famous / influential fashion designers suffered from mental illnesses and it affected various aspects of the brand and the industry?

Are the influences generally positive, negative, or both?

What would be the aftermath?

Limitations of the Research

Still some limitations exist. For one, the paper must rely on historical evidence (and therefore literary work) to obtain an adequate amount of evidence because the paper will discuss a large range of designers that fit the standard of being a fashion designer that has suffered or is suffering from a mental illness. Many of this category have died of old age or suicide, therefore for thorough investigation and comparison, data regarding these designers must be drawn from data already established from previous studies. However, reliance matters will be significantly reduced by making strong linkages between designers of many different time periods. By focusing on the general characteristics of mental illness sufferers, but also emphasizing the particularity of the fashion industry, evidence extracted from past designers who are no longer alive will be used selectively so that the results will mainly reflect time-insensitive aspects of the research question. Therefore, the paper does not lose credibility.

Theoretical Background

Definition of Terms

I. Mental Disorders

Mental disorders include a large range of mental conditions or illnesses that cause intrapersonal, interpersonal, or physical problems that are both distressing and dysfunctional. Although further divided down into many specific categories, mental disorders can be chunked into the following.

a. Anxiety Disorders

It is often that people who face distressing or burdensome tasks on a daily basis experience severe anxiety, on a level beyond the normal state of arousal. To accuse one to have this disorder, the person must be going through a high level of nervousness (arousal, anxiety) on abrupt or unnatural patterns. In other words, those who undergo common anxiety symptoms like excessive sweating, rapid heartbeat, nausea, and sweating. Mainly four anxiety disorders are common among people: GAD (generalized anxiety disorder), panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and phobias.

b. Mood Disorders

A mood disorder is one that literally causes problems with one's mood, or momentary or temporary emotions. Human emotions are highly reliant on sensory perceptions and information input, hence, it is entirely natural for a child to feel pleased when his mother compliments him, as delighted feelings fit the situation. However, it would be an oddity if a child feels extreme sadness or rage even when an emotional trigger does not exist in the context of a certain situation. Common mood disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, and cyclothymic disorder. Among these mood disorders, depression involves many

categories, ranging from mild depression or short-term depressions to life threatening types. Atypical depression is one that includes symptoms of loss of appetite, reluctance towards social relationships, and hypersensitivity. PMD, or psychotic major depression is a combination between depression and psychotic symptoms — one shows both severe depression and delusion (and / or hallucination). Melancholic depression is another common type where patients become anhedonic and feel no happiness / positivity to success but react with extreme grief and sadness to negative events. Some types of depression are restricted to be seasonal or premenstrual, but as these are rather short-lived and have less to do with the cognitive / social aspects of fashion designers, patients were excluded from the investigation.

c. Psychotic Disorders

Schizophrenia is a common psychotic disorder. Although less in number compared to depression patients or anxiety patients, it is a severe disorder that generally impairs mental processing itself. Many patients experience hallucination, which is sensing images or sounds that are not real, and delusion, which is trusting false beliefs although contrary evidence exists. Having this disorder is also potentially dangerous because it is known to be genetically related and having a schizophrenic patient as a family member or close relative can significantly affect one's possibility of having a similar disease.

d. Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are disorders that are accompanied by extreme attitudes or fear towards food and eating. Many people suffering from eating disorders are patients of either anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. Anorexia nervosa is characterized by symptoms of severe fear towards gaining weight or consuming too much food, leading many patients towards excessively restricting themselves from food, but in an unhealthy way. Patients of bulimia nervosa also share the similar fear, but often binge eat to throw up the food. Because they throw up the food after almost every meal, not only does this habit damage their insides (due to gastric acids) but also affects one's personality and his/her social relationships as well. Other rarer eating disorders include food obsession.

Naturally, the problem is dominant in the fashion industry, and especially among fashion models who must always maintain a fit body. Many models, like the well known French fashion model Isabelle Caro, have actually passed away due to these disorders as side effects of excessive weight control. Although it is an established fact that these disorders are dangerous because they can't be overcome just by the recovered desire to eat normally, many model agencies pressure models to maintain a certain body size, often too absurd that it can be detrimental to the model's health.

Methodology

I. Overview

As it is natural to first understand why mental disorders are impactful in the fashion industry, it would be essential to elaborate some pre-existing studies regarding the correlation between fashion designers and mental disorders. Therefore literature review will provide some insight for this study, followed by analytic investigations covering a larger range of connective topics.

II. Literature Review

Since there has been no comparable study on the exact topic, articles and studies on related fields have been analyzed for theoretical background. Below is a description on an article from Fashion United and an email interview with Victoria Tischler, psychologist and professor at University of West London, included in the article.

a. Mental Illness in Fashion: Opening Up the Conversation

Although the article from fashion magazine Fashion United only discusses the issue superficially, it effectively describes why many fashion designers are vulnerable to depression. Many fashion designers spend a big portion of their time inside their designing studios, pressurizing themselves to think up innovative designs that will attract consumers and give them credit in the fashion industry. But because creative ideas often pop up spontaneously and one can't always generate new creations in restrictive environments, the desperacy and desire resulting from lack of satisfying ideas often projects itself back to the fashion designer. Many fashion designers thus suffer from depression, manic disorders, and psychotic disorders. Two studies / interviews clearly show that this problem is an ongoing and depressing problem in the fashion industry.

      An industry with high suicide rates: a study from the US Center for Disease Control

      The article mentions a study conducted by the US Center for Disease Control on the suicide rates among occupations. It is said by the study that the fashion industry ranks seventh on the long list of occupations with a higher suicide rate than doctors and lawyers, which are occupations known to be exceptionally stressful jobs. It is surprising that not only are fashion related jobs seventh among all occupations in the United States, but they're also the only art related occupation on the list.

      What Professor Victoria Tischler has got to say about the depressed fashion industry

      Professor Victoria Tischler at University of West London claims that high pressure to be "original and innovative and to work excessive hours" leads fashion designers to be heavily stressed out. She also mentioned in the interview that "constant pressure of the industry to come up with 'next big thing'" pushes designers to work for hours straight and destroys both their physical and mental health. On the topic of self-medication, she claimed that reliance on alcohol and drugs can seem more natural in the fashion industry than in other careers, which is a possible reason for why mental disorders can be masked by alcohol problems or drug addiction. Although fashion designers are very susceptible to mental problems, models and fashion journalists are also heavily stressed out, she added.

      Like how Tischler words it, it's an obligation for those working in the fashion industry to look 'new'. In the process of striving for genuinity, many designers receive criticism from the grand public, which is damaging to any creator. Considering this nature of fashion, fashion designers can't help but be exposed to mental disorders.

b. Speaking to Real Fashion Designers

In an interview from Grazia, a popular fashion magazine, two fashion designers, Henry Holland (de-signer for LFW pow-er-house House of Hol-land) and Clio Peppiatt (fashion label owner) discuss the daily stress they receive and how and why it affects them. They mentioned in the interview that although fashion weeks and fashion shows are good opportunities for them to exhibit their work and grow their brands, the anxiety coming from all the financial pressure, deadline, getting the models they want, and the general stress coming from making a line of clothing until the fashion show is surely troubling, or in their words, "gut-wrenching". In response to Peppiatt, Henry Holland jokes that he still has "anx-i-ety dreams about turn-ing up to fash-ion week, and Anna Win-tour ar-rives," and he's "still back-stage tie-dy-ing t-shirts." This sounds like a fun joke, but actually portrays the stress fashion designers undergo perfectly. Their opinions agree on the point that fashion designers, regardless of what they're preparing for, go through multiple types of stress coming from different reasons. Peppiatt also points out that because many individual designers like her have to take care of both business and fashion, stress doubles and she has more to think of. All this need to constantly worry about something is troublesome for designers' mental peace.

c. The Business of Fashion Report on Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Art

It is also shocking how many fashion school students are already going through immense amounts of assignments and are being stressed out even before entering the actual industry. This shows that

regardless of occupation and social position, people working in or near the fashion industry receive lots of mental pressure from getting the materials, thinking up outstanding designs, making them, and exhibiting them in fashion shows or open collections.

This report from The Business of Fashion effectively demonstrate these problems. By in-depth surveying students from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Art (majoring in fashion design, fashion communication, or any type of fashion studies), the report describes how students are both physically and mentally stressed out, and even how some students have high drug reliance to stand all the rigorous tasks given by rigorous professors. Conversations included in the report also give some insight for what the students actually think about school.

Among the students, there was a clear division between those for and those against. Those who said that pressure in necessary pointed out that the effortful assignments distinguish those who really deserve to work in the fashion industry, become a good seedbed for actually working in the industry where one always has to create and exhibit, and prevent students from dabbing into the studies without really feeling passionate about what they're learning. On the other hand, some students thought that the pressure kills creativity, and although to a certain extent pressure is needed, the pressure given by fashion schools is just too much.

Like the junior who committed suicide due to overworking, whether or not students appreciate the burdensome assignments, it is true that the amount is overwhelming and therefore pressures many people.

Discussion I

Now as the real point of this paper is to investigate how real life designers suffer from mental disorders and how they're portrayed through brand aesthetics, this discussion section will mainly be composed of case studies, looking at the individual cases of different designers, finding correlations and cause and effect relationships between the designer's conditions and brand aesthetics, and studying related aspects.

Case Study

a. Kate Spade

Kate Spade is probably the representative of all fashion designers who have suffered from mental disorders. Kate Valentine Spade was the founder of Kate Spade, her own brand named after her own, and was a successful fashion businessman in the tough fashion industry. In the market she was known as an innovative, stylewise revolutionary designer as she focused on bringing out warmth and femininity out of women instead of chicness and boldness. Because she was known to be a woman who supported all girls' dreams, an instigator of the trend of female designers becoming head designers and working actively in their respective fields, her sudden death shocked the public and many fans. Kate Spade's motto was happiness, but it was revealed that she had been suffering from severe depression and marital relationship problems with her husband.

1. Kate Spade and Depression

Kate Spade's designs and their relationship with her depression is surely remarkable because the way she dealt with her depression was different from any other. While most depression patients tend to express their conditions either intentionally or unintentionally, her way of dealing with depression was so secretive that not even Spade's fans were aware of the fact that she was a patient. Kate Spade's goals in managing her brand was to give women hope, give them a warm hug, be cheery and "womanlike" in many ways. At the same time she was a smart CEO, a renowned fashion designer receiving lots of love calls from celebrities and movies, and also a respected mother who was known to care for her daughter dearly. All this stunned many women and encouraged them to bring out their fullest potentials in the most possible way. Her death, was we can all imagine, was thus the most tragic, leaving lots of women,

especially those in the fashion industry, feeling empty and lost. Fern Mallis, former director of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, and a friend, called her death "so out of character", according to New York Times.

In other words, she acted antidepressant. Rather than becoming downhearted due to her mental conditions, she acted all happy and cheery. On interviews, she acted as if she had a cheerful 50's vibe and was happy 24/7. Actresses from Ocean's 8 including Mindy Kaling discussed her tragic death during an event and said that she had no idea that Kate Spade had depression because as a person often inspired by her attitudes, she always seemed so positive.

2. Her Designs and What They Reflect

Because Kate Spade had this unique approach to her disorder, her ideologies towards 'how to act' was evident in her designs to. She advised women to be cheerful and to always have trust in themselves, and this attitude is best shown in the use of colors in her designs.

Kate Spade is known to have used many vivid colors representing her ideals on happiness and femininity. A lot of Spade's bags (to many women, Spade's bags were appropriate as their first handbags due to their attractive designs and reasonable prices) were colors of pale pink, coral, and purple, all colors emphasizing womanhood. Hence, the use of colors is one distinguishing point of Kate Spade and it effectively shows not just her attitude in life but also how the public viewed her brand and the general brand identity.
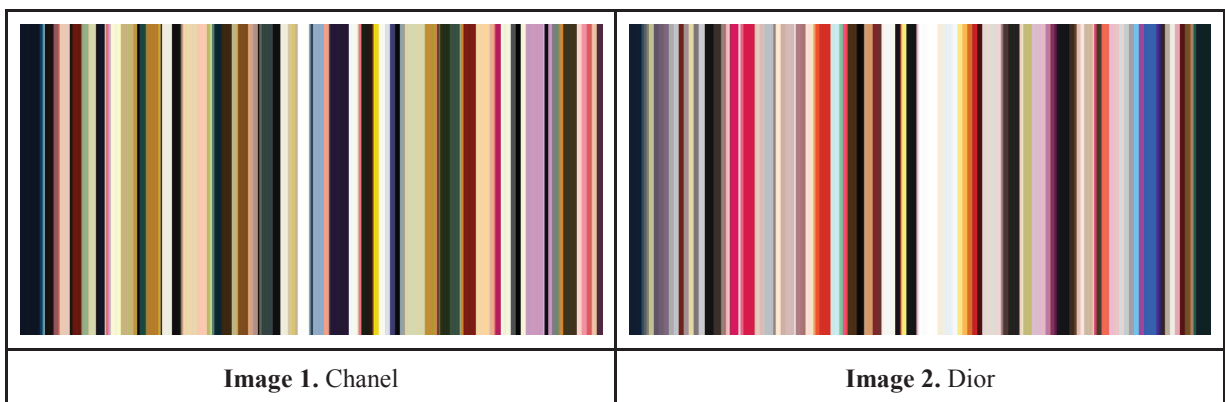
To take a better look and how the public perceives Kate Spade's brand identity from the aesthetic point of view, a computer program called Codename Cuttlefish was used. This program allows users to view a color barcode (color barcode : a compact set of colors put into the shape of a barcode) when entering a keyword relevant to the search, depending on popularity. The following is how this program works.
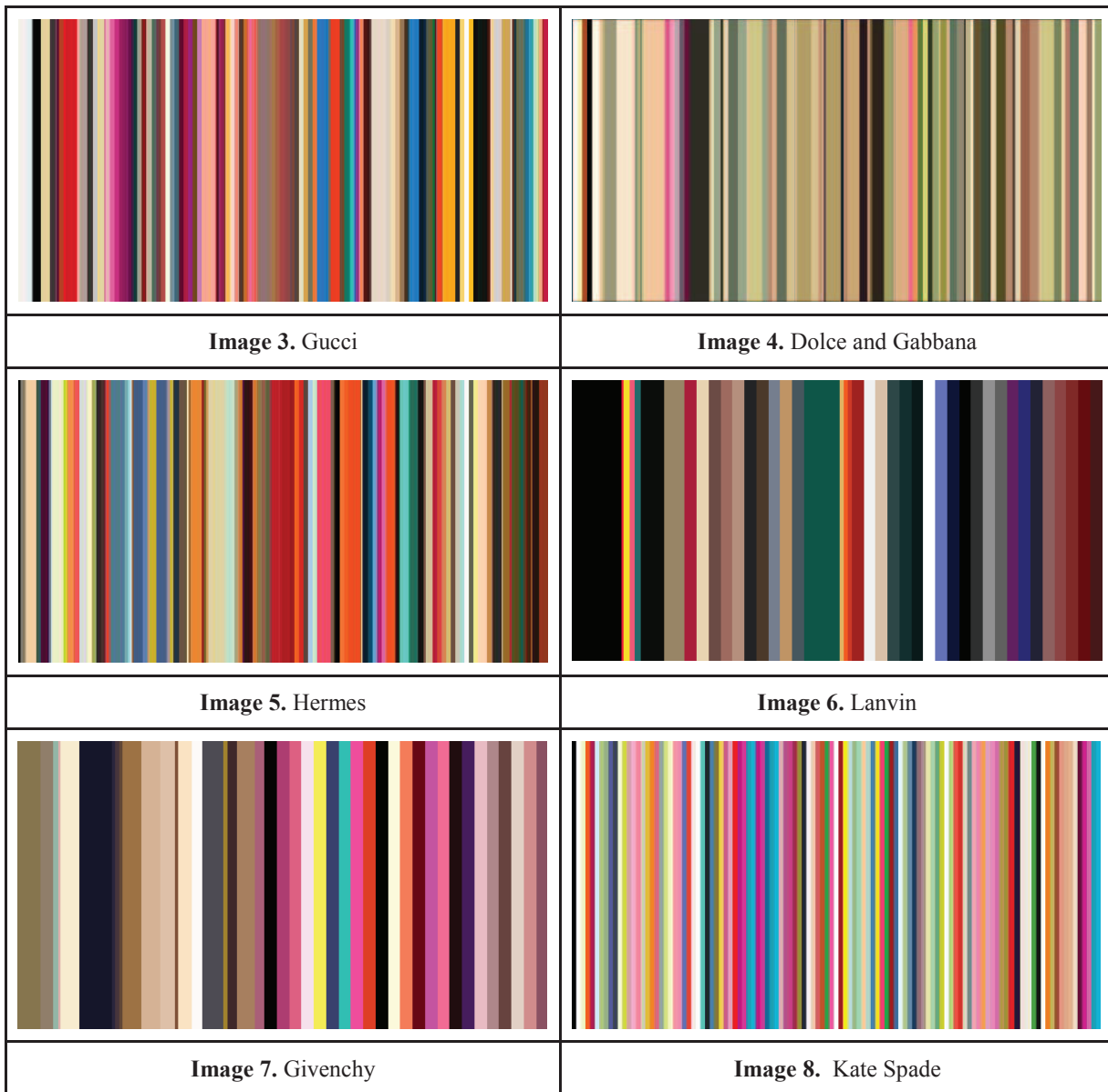
> Step 1 : The user enters a keyword (ex. Paris, Miami, Tumblr, Apple).
> Step 2 : The program shows one color barcode within a few seconds. The colors are individual colors from color palettes generated by users tagged with the keyword. (ex. If the user enters the keyword Paris, then the color barcode is generated from color palettes made by users titled <A Night in Paris>, <Parisian>, <Lost in Paris>, <Paris and London>, or anything tagged Paris.)
> Step 3 : The color palettes with the most thumbs-ups are included. Therefore, this barcode becomes a reasonable method to see how the public (as not all users are experts in color theory or professional designers) understands a brand in terms of visual identity / aesthetics and thus how effective Kate Spade's color strategy has been.

Compare Kate Spade's barcode to a set of random haute-couture brands like Chanel.

| **Image 1.** Chanel | **Image 2.** Dior |

Image 3. Gucci

Image 4. Dolce and Gabbana

Image 5. Hermes

Image 6. Lanvin

Image 7. Givenchy

Image 8. Kate Spade

The difference between Kate Spade's color barcode and the others is evident. Kate Spade's colors are much more colorful, vivid, and bright, well portraying the intended image and how customers perceive the brand. The brand's colors contain more pale pastels, orange, lemon, lilac, white, colors that symbolize the brand itself. Color for fashion is an essentiality. Seeing how heavily Kate Spade's use of shades and the influence of her depression had on it is noteworthy, in terms of brand aesthetics and customer perception.

As can be seen above, her personal experiences with mental problems and her public image as being a skilled designer and good mother collided at some point, but she tried to overcome it by spreading good words and hopeful messages to women all around the world. Customers also However, it is known that since stepping down and giving reigns to Deborah Lloyd, formerly of Burberry, her depression worsened. Hence, Kate Spade New York is facing many problems — how will they revive their previous bubbly, warm image and appeal to their customers once again who loved their brand for that reason? Most of all, how will their revenue change since their previous CEO, founder, and the one who was really the brand's face, passed away due to depression?

3. The Brand's Future

Kate Spade

Brand Image		Brand Strategies	
Strength	Weakness	Strength	Weakness
- Warm, friendly - Timeless - Stylish - Feminine - Utilitarian - Generation-nonspecific	- Less of a modern look - Not exactly a 'quality brand' image - Kate Spade's suicide : against brand image	- Steady brand identity leads to steady sales - Female empowerment goes well with modern ideas	- No clear solution to recovering positive image - Not much modern SNS / internet engagement

Image 9. Kate Spade New York : Brand Image and Strategies

Although Kate Spade has a warm and friendly image and products have a timeless, generation-nonspecificity that boosts its sales, the biggest problem with the brand's image is that in the market Kate Spade was neither a pricey haute-couture brand nor a modern, fast-fashion brand. Now since Kate Spade has passed away and their fundamental brand image is shaking, it's important to reconsider their current brand strategies and modify them so that they can properly reflect the crisis they're facing.

Now it's time for Kate Spade to rebuild their previous image by making more modern engagements. Go beyond magazines, TV commercials, ads……., and remind customers of the brand. For instance, if Kate Spade creates an online website where female workers in various industries can come together and create a platform to share thoughts on depression, not only will the brand regain their distinctive image but it will also make customers think, "Yeah, even though Kate Spade passed away, her brand hasn't changed a bit." Using this strategy as an interactive source between the brand and customers, core customers will gather once again and boost sales. It will also focus public interest towards how Kate Spade tried to fight depression, not on how Kate Spade advocated happiness and femininity but faced a tragic death due to depression. It can turn a risk into a chance.

b. Alexander McQueen

1. Alexander McQueen and Depression

Lee Alexander McQueen, founder of Alexander McQueen, suicided February 11, 2010, due to severe depression resulting from work overload and his mother's death. He had high reliance on cocaine and drugs, along with some tranquilizers some time before he committed suicide. The designer's psychiatrist said he had anxiety and depression for some time and that McQueen had two incidents of drug overdose. It is known that his doctors had problems in making him attend therapies and that he relied much on cocaine to relieve his stress. In the end, he was found in his flat, hanging, by his housekeeper César García. Like the case of Kate Spade, his death was mourned by people all over the world, his friends commonly speaking of his warm nature and diligence.

It is said that his depression lasted for at least 3 years. Considering that the prime reason for his depression was work overload in the rigorous fashion industry, there is a very high possibility that his depression lasted longer.

2. Alexander McQueen : Savage Beauty

In 2011, the Metropolitan Museum in New York exhibited unreleased / inspirational pieces from Alexander McQueen, pieces that he had been working on but did not get the chance to be viewed by the world. This posthumous exhibition discusses and honours his work, which is definitely remarkable as it's not easy for an individual designer to exhibit their own work at the Met. However, Anna Wintour, head editor of Vogue US, mentioned that McQueen in fact has the ability to exhibit his own work at such a big gallery and still make people come.

To discuss some of the reasons why he is widely praised is directly shown in the pieces exhibited here. First, he drew inspiration from everywhere. In a dress he made for the VOSS show in 2001, he put ostrich feathers into the skirt and a top made from specimen slides used in lab experiments. Another was made from mussel shells inspired by the seafood restaurant in Covent Garden, where the McQueen team used to feast. Second, he was truthful with emotions. In the sections of Alexander McQueen : Savage Beauty, sections are divided according to themes but also emotions. The shapes, textures, materials and shades tell viewers about how McQueen felt about "things" at that time.

"I am the Edgar Allan Poe of Fashion"

Image 10. Alexander McQueen spoke of his resemblance to Edgar Allan Poe

Image 11. Piece from Alexander McQueen : Savage Beauty

Relating his emphasis on emotion to depression, it is notable how he emphasized the emotion of rage. He referred to many undesirable moments in history — war, the Black Death, religious battles and tragedies. Relating this to art history and art itself, he portrayed the anger he felt through fashion. Throughout the entire exhibition at the Met, hints of negative feelings can be seen — an entire section is inspired by a sinking ship, sad, mournful videos of a woman in water playing in the ceiling. McQueen very often described himself as the Edgar Allan Poe of fashion. Like him he was depressed, and the emotions were projected in his work; he was frequently inspired by gothic colors like black, gothic

geometric designs like the cross or laces, and goth culture itself. His anger towards historical events, social issues, and most of all, the pressure he received from his burdensome work all showed through his designs in fashion.

Though it isn't ideal that the depression of one fashion designer has to be portrayed onto his work, the darkness he intended and the darkness he showed through his collections is one point that makes Alexander McQueen stand out from other designers. In other pieces too, it can be seen that he was one with wild emotions; the lines, shapes, extravagance and "anti-loftiness" of his products well portrayed this characteristic. Thus it can be said that although depression pushed Alexander McQueen into death, which is a total tragedy, it's also what made his distinctive brand image and visual identity. Ironically, what saved his brand was also what killed him.

3. A Misogynist on the Fashion Runway?

Alexander McQueen is a very controversial figure in many ways. From time to time he was criticized for having a bad attitude; oftentimes his coworkers mentioned him as a tiresome person to work with. His bold personality and intense working style often threatened fashion show managers and models.

Alexander McQueen also received lots of suspicion from feminists and women rights activists. Lots claimed him to be a misogynist (someone who shows hatred / contempt / prejudice towards women or girls) because of the typicality of women's dresses he made, things he said about his priorities in designing female clothes, and the suffering of female models on the runway.

For his graduation show for Central Saint Martins in London, he did a collection influenced by Jack the Ripper and Victorian prostitutes. The fact that his fashion show was "inspired" by a serial killer who killed five women itself startled many people and raged feminists. After graduation, he revealed his "Highland Rape" collection, using laces, chiffon, tartan, scrap clothing, and other materials. Skulls, leather drapes, tampon dresses, fetish shoes, and other mind blowing but gruesome details made many people question his thoughts on women. Although he denied the suspicion, many people still claimed to find hints of misogynist symbols and expressions on his designs. The way he treated the female models was also a matter of controversy. Many gave up on the job, one fainted on stage wearing an absurdly tight leather corset, and McQueen was criticized for being too harsh without any consideration of how the models would react to his clothes.

Image 12. Alexander McQueen's Highland Rape Collection

Compared to before, Alexander McQueen's designs surely became less gothic and grotesque, but still maintained the McQueen-y dark, glamorous look. Whether it was a result of receiving such massive criticism nobody knows for sure. However, it is undeniable that the criticism he received regarding his somewhat misogynist designs influenced his mental conditions. How McQueen's designs change over the course of time show how criticism can influence one's "taste" in fashion.

c. Yves Saint Laurent

1. Yves Saint Laurent and Depression

Yves Saint Laurent, the founder of YSL and a new paradigm of feminine wear, is also known to have suffered from depression. His depression was chronic, and as Pierre Bergé, the co-founder of the Yves Saint Laurent brand said, "Designing made him deeply miserable." While it was art he was fully immersed in (According to an interview by Telegraph, when the interviewer asked Pierre that "Legend has it that the flat on rue de Babylone was so packed full of treasures that there were Monets hanging in the lavatories. True?", Pierre shrugged and said "Well, yes."), art was also what ultimately led him to depression, drug reliance, and stress-derived brain cancer. The more he became a renowned, unreachable celebrity in the fashion industry, the more he detested fashion. Like how Coco Chanel said that "fashion fades but style remains", it was Saint Laurent's obsession towards style that captured him from leaving the industry.

Although he didn't kill himself for depression like the other two above, his mental disorder and heavy reliance on drugs was equally as influential on his life. While he is still considered to be one of the few designers that first designed women's outfits that could empower the social status of women, he was, at the same time, a mentally fragile introvert who feared receiving criticism. He was later sent to a mental hospital. From his experiences at Dior (he was only 21 years old when he became head designer for the prestigious Parisian brand) to the foundation of his own brand, YSL Paris, it is worthy of discussing how his continuously fragile mentality affected his designs and career.

2. Yves Saint Laurent in Dior

YSL stayed in Dior from 1957 (Christian Dior's death) to 1960, where he was forced to give out his position as main designer due to a call from the military. Because he is known for having suffered from depression since a young age due to bullying, a quick runthrough on Saint Laurent's fashion design evolution will show how his designs were a deviation from those of other designers, and how he had a unique taste for "beauty in clothes" itself.

In 1958, Yves Saint Laurent did a first showcase of his first collection at Dior. Named the Trapeze Collection, Yves Saint Laurent directly challenged Dior's traditional tight-sleeved clothes by emphasizing wavy features of the fabric and the original shapes of human bodies.

Image 13. Dior Collection 1958 : Trapeze

The Dior Collection of 1959 in Moscow was heavily influenced by Soviet fashion and the authoritarian social atmosphere back then. Khrushchev was the leader, who aimed to liberalize political culture than before, where dictators like Lenin and Stalin had full authority. Khrushchev was very inviting towards Western, especially French fashion brands and often invited them to form links with fashion designers of the Soviet Union.

Image 14. Dior Collection 1959 : Moscow

His 1960 Dior collection was inspired by the beatnik movement — dark colors and the use of unique materials like leather was first used. His exhibition of the leather jacket was controversial because at that time, because leather was thought to be a type of fabric inappropriate for haute couture. He received much criticism for this.

Image 15. Dior Collection 1960 : The Leather Jacket

3. Yves Saint Laurent as a Brand

Pursuing more intervention in fashion and branding itself after returning from military call, Yves Saint Laurent created his own brand around 1961 with his co-founder Pierre Bergé. The following collection of images is like a miniature timeline for Yves Saint Laurent Paris and how Saint Laurent's creations evolved over time. If a viewer focuses on the designs of individual pieces, it is visible that the brand maintained minimalistic, elegant, and well outlined through its development. Images were brought from magazines from the 20th century.

The Evolution of Yves Saint Laurent Paris (YSL Fashion Mag.)
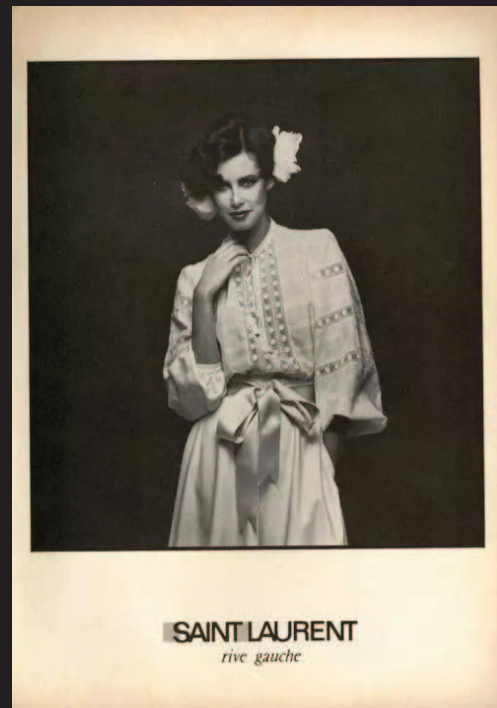

Image 16. YSL SS 74

Image 17. YSL SS 77

Image 18. YSL SS 79

Image 19. YSL SS 80

Image 20. YSL SS 85

Image 21. YSL SS 89

Image 22. YSL SS 92

Image 23. YSL SS 97

Image 24. YSL SS 01

Image 25. YSL SS 06

Image 26. YSL SS 07
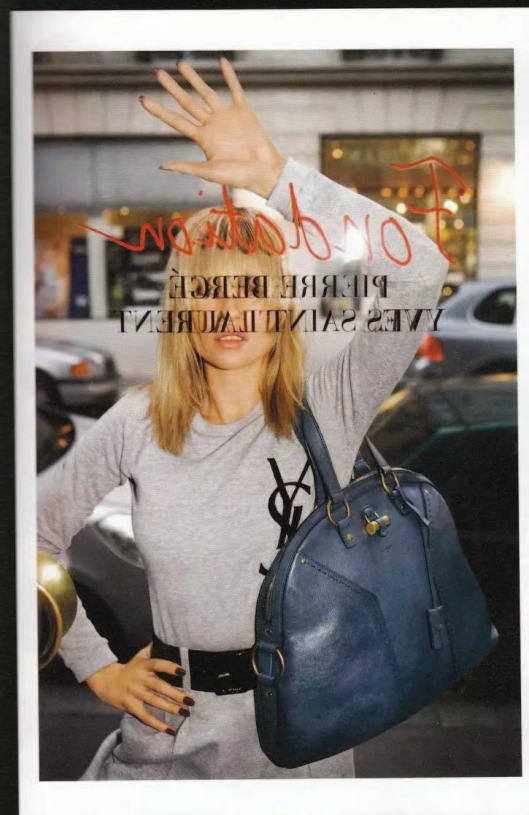
Image 27. YSL SS 08

Image 28. YSL SS 12   **Image 29.** YSL SS 13

Image Source @ The Evolution Of Yves Saint Laurent, From The '60s To Now, Buzzfeed

4. Yves Saint Laurent and the Mondrian Collection

One of YSL's famous collections is the Mondrian Collection, inspired by the renowned geometric and aesthetic piece by Piet Mondrian, a Dutch artist. Piet Mondrian is well known to apply abstraction to many of his artworks, including *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* (1930). This piece was used in one of YSL's collections called the Mondrian Collection, consisted of six dresses and outfits with geometric patterns printed on fabric. This collection is known to be the first one to fully use the original painting without making any manipulations or distortions. Yves Saint Laurent has mentioned previously in interviews that this painting and Mondrian's other pieces have deeply inspired him on applying artworks and minimalism to his designs. Yves Saint Laurent and Dior during YSL's era both show that YSL was immersed in minimalist designs and elegance coming out from simplicity.

It is an established fact that depressed patients tend to incline to minimalism, whether in form of visual minimalism or abstract minimalism (or minimalism of thought). Because these patients experience lots of confusion considering daily activities or thinking processes, they like to lessen their list on everything — daily tasks, memories, diets, friends. In terms of art therapy, it is also known that abstract art and geometric art can lessen the mental stress of depressed patients.

How YSL favored minimalism in art and used many of those designs onto his clothes well shows he strived for mental and visual stability. Although it may be a matter of personal taste or brand direction, it is undeniable that YSL's personal mental instability and desire for a minimalistic couture contributed to YSL's current brand image and visual identity of being a simple and elegant luxury brand.

5. Yves Saint Laurent and Kate Moss

The following has not been proved by any factual claim made by any expert or worker in the fashion industry. No evidence has been proposed that makes this explanation completely true. However, the following has been believed my many people (including the public) and therefore well reflects brand images of several fashion brands with head designers that suffered from drug addiction or related problems.

Kate Moss, a fashion star of the 90s, was at the time extremely popular for her 'heroin chic' look, a type of hazy look that reminds viewers that of a drug addict, but considered stylish at the time. Kate Moss currently has her own agency and still is an active model, fashion designer, and celebrity based in the UK.

She was extremely popular in the luxury field. Although Kate Moss modeled for many different brands including Calvin Klein, H&M, Chanel, and many more, it was Yves Saint Laurent that loved the model the most. Starting from the mid 1990s until 2008 and on, Kate Moss was directly and indirectly featured in many of Yves Saint Laurent's campaigns for more than 10 years. Yves Saint Laurent yearned for her heroin chic looks and unique facial characteristics that made the luxury products look even more attractive.

However, Kate Moss was out of stardom when she was accused of being a cocaine addict. While all other brands decided not to renew their contract with Moss, only Dior (for which Moss' contract had not expired yet), Alexander McQueen, and YSL continued using Kate Moss as their model. Considering that Alexander McQueen and Yves Saint Laurent had the opportunity to choose whether they would continue using Moss as their model, many people thought it to be highly possible that the two brands' perspective towards drugs or their understanding of drugs affected their choice to renew the contract, as both of the brands' head designers have suffered from a similar problem.

Though this issue has never been proved with concrete evidence, the prevalence of this way of interpretation proves that mental disorders and drug abuse of fashion designers heavily influence the public's perception of the brand and the brand image.

Image 30. Kate Moss for YSL (YSL)

Discussion II

Investigation I

An experiment was conducted in order to distinguish if customers can also spot mental disorders portrayed in brand aesthetics and to examine how they perceive such visual cues. Another goal for the experiment was to document how customers "feel" about a head designer for a fashion brand. Would they choose to buy the product even if they knew this fact? How would customers' affiliation towards the brand change, and how would the mental disorder shape the brand image shown to the public?

For the experiment, exactly 50 volunteers and random subjects were tested. 30 of them were volunteers of different ages, gender, social status, occupation, and area in Korea. Some were friends,

some were relatives, some were past neighbors or past teachers, some doctors, a few government officials, an accountant, and an artist. It was made sure that 10 of them had the experience of living abroad to make sure that they didn't just represent how the typical Korean would think. The other twenty were neighbors of different age groups, gender, and occupation generally unfamiliar with foreign fashion brands except for their brand names. None of them were notified of the research topic.

50 subjects were then each sent links to fashion show videos on Youtube. There were 10 links in total, fashion shows of 5 brands. Two shows from each of the five brands — Chanel, Prada, Ralph Lauren, Moschino, and Alexander McQueen. They were all told through a message that they would need to watch each fashion show from 0:00 ~ 2:00 (for two minutes each) and fill out a questionnaire after watching all 10 videos. Two videos were shown for every brand to give the experiment subjects to get a grasp of each brand's fashion design style. A few adult subjects over 55 years old had to be assisted in watching the videos because they were unfamiliar with using Youtube. Of course, the main focus was to see if the subjects could detect the fashion show organized by a mental disorder patient, Alexander McQueen. Moschino, a brand led by creative director Jeremy Scott, was used as a distractor for this experiment. Moschino's 2015 S/S (The Moschino Capsule Collection) and 2018 S/S use many objects that remind viewers of drugs, pastel goth, and minor fashion cultures that correlate with images of hallucination, insanity, and substance abuse. However, Jeremy Scott is neither a mental disorder patient nor a drug addict. Hence, it would be the focus of this experiment to check whether the 50 subjects can distinguish Alexander McQueen (head designer with depression o / mental disorder or drug abuse as a fashion show theme x) to Moschino (head designer with depression x / mental disorder or drug abuse as a fashion show theme o) or any other fashion brand (head designer with depression x / mental disorder or drug abuse as a fashion show theme x).

The following is the translated version of the first section of the questionnaire filled out by the 50 subjects. The numbers show how the subjects responded.

Brand Name	Which brand seems to be, in your opinion, directed by a head fashion designer diagnosed with a mental disorder *? (* : Mental disorders include a large range of mental conditions or illnesses that cause intrapersonal, interpersonal, or physical problems that are both distressing and dysfunctional)
Chanel	2 (4%)
Prada	5 (10%)
Ralph Lauren	0 (-)
Moschino	11 (22%)
Alexander McQueen	32 (64%)

Another set of questions were given to distinguish factors for the responses. Because of what aspects of the fashion brands did the subjects make the decisions mentioned in the previous question? The following numbers are average scores from a range of 0 to 10 given by the 50 subjects.

Table 1. Questionnaire Results

Brand Name	Chanel	Prada	Ralph Lauren	Moschino	Alexander McQueen
Warmness, friendliness	3.2	4.1	4.6	6.0	0.6
Geometric designs	5.6	4.9	3.6	6.6	8.9
Unbalance	4.5	2.9	1.5	3.5	9.3
Utilitarian	5	6.7	8	2.1	1
Lifeless	3.2	3.4	4	2.5	6.8
Seasonal	7.9	8.1	7.3	5.5	3.3
Culture-specific	3.4	3.8	2.2	6.7	4.1
Uncanny	2	1.3	1.1	3.9	8.8

The way subjects responded to Alexander McQueen seems to vary with how the subjects responded to other brands. First and foremost, subjects felt a low level of warmness and friendliness with Alexander McQueen. For both McQueen and Moschino, respondents spotted a largely eye-catching amount of geometric designs. Many responded that the two brands were not really seasonal, or reliant on seasonal changes and temperature. However, a significantly large amount of subjects claimed Alexander McQueen's fashion products and runways to be unbalanced, lifeless, uncanny. The keywords lifeless and uncanny were used to demonstrate if the subjects reacted to some points of the 'Uncanny Valley' theory displayed in Alexander McQueen's shows. Uncanny Valley refers to the phenomenon where people feel extreme disgust and fright towards robots or forms similar to humans that look close to humans but in an awkward way. For instance, people do not fear stuffed dolls or factory robots because they resemble humans only a slight bit, but often fear corpses, zombies, or extremely developed humanoids because they look closer to humans.

The results were significant because how subjects perceived Alexander McQueen's shows to be creepy, inhumane, dark, and uncanny not only well reflected his shows like Voss 2001, but also were similar to the reactions people often make towards uncomfortable and unfamiliar thoughts — depressive, maniac states of mind or drug related conditions.

Hence it can be said that brand aesthetics (fashion products, shows, visual characteristics in overall) are in fact affected by the mental state of head designers. Although Alexander McQueen was used for this experiment in order to provide a clear, comparable fashion brand, brands like YSL also share significant similarities. For instance, while focusing on highly abstract and geometric features like Alexander McQueen, YSL wears are much more utilitarian and focus more on color expression — the monochromatic, black-based clothes also give off a strong gothic feeling. The way Kate Spade's brand dealt with the head designer's depression was very different however, because they focused on a completely opposite brand image that was appealing to their target consumers. Therefore it can be said that rather than having a certain pattern of relationship between the mental illnesses of fashion designers and brand aesthetics, it must be said that there is a high level of correlation in practically any field of brand aesthetics (fashion products, exhibitions, advertisements, and public opinions on the brand).

Image 31. An Example of the Uncanny Valley (Inverse)

Investigation II

One eye-catching phenomenon during research was that after Kate Spade's long suffering from depression, sales for the brand skyrocketed and still is maintaining its growth. Although many critics do say that Kate Spade's unique brand identity is now at danger, statistics tell the completely opposite thing. Except for a short, slight downfall in revenues some time after her death, Kate Spade's sole revenue had expanded to 500% of that before the founder's death, and is still increasing thanks to new possibilities opening up the Chinese market. Fashion magazines report that the significant increase is majorly due to shocked customers, revisiting Kate Spade shops around the world to remind themselves of the warmth the brand used to give off. Similar things happened for other fashion brands like Alexander McQueen; after fashion designers revealed their struggles with mental illnesses or suicided for that reason, revenues increased. This phenomenon led to the question : why?

To solve this question, another experiment was conducted to see how effective the revealing of mental illnesses could be for fashion brands in receiving attention from the public, hence, expanding the scope and attracting new customers. In other words, would it be beneficial or detrimental for the fashion brand if potential customers get to know that the brand's leader has a mental problem?

73 random people were asked through a street survey if they would be more attracted to an either luxury, semi-luxury, or premium brand if the fashion designers (head designers) revealed that they had depression, anxiety problems, or any other kind of mental suffering. Surprisingly, 43 said yes, 21 said no, 9 said doesn't matter. When asked for reasons, these kinds of answers were most frequent.

Yes (43 people / 73 people, 0.59%)

- The disorder makes the brand seem more artistic (fashionable) because artistic people often have mental disorders. (17)
- It gives the impression that the fashion designer puts that much effort into creating new products. (15)
- The information itself is interesting, so I would want to search the brand to check out its style and products. (11)

No (21 people / 73 people, 0.29%)

- – Wearing the designer's clothes doesn't feel right because of the negative / depressing image the brand has now. (15)
- – I wouldn't want to represent the fashion designer by wearing it. (6)

Doesn't Matter (9 people / 73 people, 0.12%)

- – Style is what's important, not the designer's personal story. (7)
- – Doesn't matter because having a mental disorder sounds neither good/bad. (2)

Therefore, the results show that revealing the mental illnesses of fashion designers can actually gather much attention among potential customers. It is also a surprising discovery that a large percentage of them also perceive the fact positively and become more attentive towards the fashion brand even if they were not interested before.

Conclusion

The study began with a curiosity on how the mental disorders of fashion designers would be expressed through brand visual identity. Using methodologies of literature review, news article and magazine review, in-depth case studies concerning three most topicwise relevant fashion brands, and real life experiments, the investigation was able to drive credible conclusions. Images from fashion lookbooks, magazines, and exhibitions were used in order to give visual illustrations along with detailed explanation.

In short, the research proves that if the head designer or a fashion brand has a mental disorder, there are many different ways in which it is portrayed through brand aesthetics, but with a serious impact regardless of how it is expressed. It is also that, unlike expectations, the information can grab customers' attention and a majority responds positively to it.

Acknowledgement

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