Social Transparency in the Fashion World
Fashion Brands vs. Fashion Media

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Abstract

As a major player in the world economy, the fashion industry has a wide-reaching impact on the lives of people around the world and is also intertwined with a number of pressing environmental and social themes including climate change, working conditions, diversity, inclusion, human rights, and animal welfare. For this reason, fashion brands are keen to highlight their actions to address such concerns, while seeking to enhance perceptions of transparency, convey an image of trustworthiness, and distinguish themselves from competitors.

This paper investigates how fashion brands communicate social transparency in relation to key environmental and social themes trending in the fashion world. It aims to identify which themes are the most prominent and how these may differ from those promoted by the fashion media that have a crucial role in driving awareness of and ongoing interest in them. A corpus consisting of the sustainability reports of fashion brands was compared to a complementary dataset of textual material relating to social transparency extracted from the website communications of a global fashion media company. Both the fashion brand corpus and the fashion media dataset were submitted to semantic and lexical analysis with corpus software, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The results indicate that the fashion brands placed considerably more emphasis on the environmental aspects of social transparency linked to manufacturing processes, while the fashion media company provided much greater visibility to social issues such as diversity, inclusion, and human rights. The findings can be applied in instructional settings in the areas of business communication and fashion writing to help learners acquire skills useful for producing texts that promote social transparency.

1. Introduction

The fashion industry has a significant economic impact on the lives of people around the world. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (12 July 2018), it employs more than 75 million people globally and is valued at $2.5 trillion dollars. It also contributes to establishing key infrastructures in poor countries, thus contributing to general prosperity, but especially to independence among women as they perform much of the

manufacturing of fashion products (Fletcher and Tham 2014). However, the fashion industry intersects crucially with multiple major issues facing modern society, including the environment and climate change, working conditions and human rights, diversity and inclusion, gender equality, and animal welfare (Solomon and Rabolt 2004). As noted by Entwistle (2014), the fashion industry has a higher environmental footprint with respect to other industries and has often been confronted with allegations of poor labour practices, thus triggering growing concerns among stakeholders and the public at large. The seriousness of these issues is reflected in the words of Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: "It is clear that the fashion industry needs to change gears. It needs to become environmentally sound and support a social transformation towards decent and healthy jobs" (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1 March 2018).

Research has shown that fashion consumers are increasingly demanding products that are perceived as not causing harm to people or the planet (i.e. *sustainable fashion[1]*), even if there tends to be an "attitude-behaviour gap" in which their consumption behaviours do not actually align with their professed values (Cairns et al. 2022, 1262). To address stakeholders' concerns, fashion companies publish *sustainability reports* to communicate efforts to preserve environmental, economic, and social well-being, which constitute a widely used genre of non-financial disclosure across business sectors (Herzig and Schaltegger 2011). The publication of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and sustainability-related reports allows companies to cultivate an image of trustworthiness (Bondi 2016), while simultaneously enhancing perceptions of transparency (Jackson et al. 2020; Ball 2009), with positive repercussions on their reputation and positioning with respect to competitors (Koskela 2018). While Ball (2009, 297) defines transparency simply as "the degree of openness in conveying information", in the context of sustainability reporting Williams (2000) articulates the more nuanced notion of social transparency, meaning the public disclosure of information relating specifically to the environmental and social effects of business activities. Indeed, sustainability reporting can be construed as an instrument of *social transparency*, whereby companies are expected to consistently provide stakeholders with accurate and reliable information about their initiatives in the environmental and social arenas. In this way, they have the opportunity to evaluate the information and discern what is most relevant to them (Baraibar-Diez and Sotorrío 2018). If companies are able to portray themselves as both socially responsible and socially transparent, then they are more likely to succeed in establishing trust (Salvi and

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[1] Sustainable fashion is a term that is currently used prominently by fashion entities and policymakers. According to the European Union Commission (2022), "sustainability is the buzzword when it comes to fashion."

Turnbull 2017). As a result, the ability to communicate social transparency effectively remains a high priority for companies (Christensen and Cheney 2015).

Following this brief introduction, the remainder of the article will be organized as follows: section 1 provides background information on fashion brands and the fashion media as the two communicative settings addressed in the study and outlines the aim, section 2 describes the data compiled for the analysis and the methodological approach, section 3 presents and discusses the results, and section 4 draws some conclusions and offers some pedagogical reflections.

2. Fashion brands and fashion media

It is well known that brands and branding are a core feature of economic activity in modern life. In the fashion industry, brands take on even greater importance in light of a product that is so strongly associated with aesthetics, style, and image (Pike 2013). The strength of fashion brands also derives from close connections with other aspects of popular culture, such as pop music (McRobbie 1998). This trend began in the 1960s in "Swinging London" when famous models like Twiggy and Carnaby Street boutiques steered consumers' fashion choices worldwide, and has since continued with the consolidation of designer logos, ranging from sportswear manufacturers to luxury fashion houses. Hauge (2007) further highlighted the fundamental task of brands in the fashion industry: building a strong relationship between producers and consumers, which then leads to brand loyalty as a crucial element of the success of any brand. With particular reference to social transparency, the ability of a brand to establish and effectively communicate an image of environmental and social responsibility is a strategic goal of brand management that not only boosts loyalty but also contrasts possible negative perceptions that may arise among consumers (Kim and Oh 2020).

Alongside fashion brands, the fashion media are also a key player when it comes to engaging with consumers and influencing their choices on a variety of levels. Broadly speaking, the purpose of the fashion media is to describe, analyse, and review fashion-products and entities (Lynge-Jorlén 2012). However, this characterization does not adequately capture the depth of the symbiotic relationship that exists between fashion and media where meanings are conveyed through a range of print, broadcast, and digital resources (Wolbers 2009). With specific reference to fashion writing, Moeran (2004) suggests that it is language that transforms mere clothing into fashion.

When interfacing with consumers, fashion media have a multifaceted function:

- informative: diffusing information that connects producers to consumers, thereby influencing consumption practices (Godart 2012);

- expressive: affecting the desire for products and brands (Su and Tong 2020);
- cultural: shaping values, attitudes, and identities (Mora et al. 2014).

As a consequence, fashion media can be instrumental in influencing consumers' perceptions of social transparency by informing, educating and inspiring them in relation to fashion brands' environmental and social initiatives (Denisova 2021).

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the synergistic roles of fashion brands and fashion media in the achievement of social transparency. On the one hand, fashion brands are responsible for implementing strategies in their manufacturing processes to safeguard both the environment and social well-being. These actions and commitments are then communicated in designated reports that are made publicly available, fostering social transparency. On the other hand, fashion media drive awareness and interest in environmental and social issues affecting the fashion industry, while showcasing to their readership the brands that best practice environmental and social strategies, thus also contributing to greater social transparency.
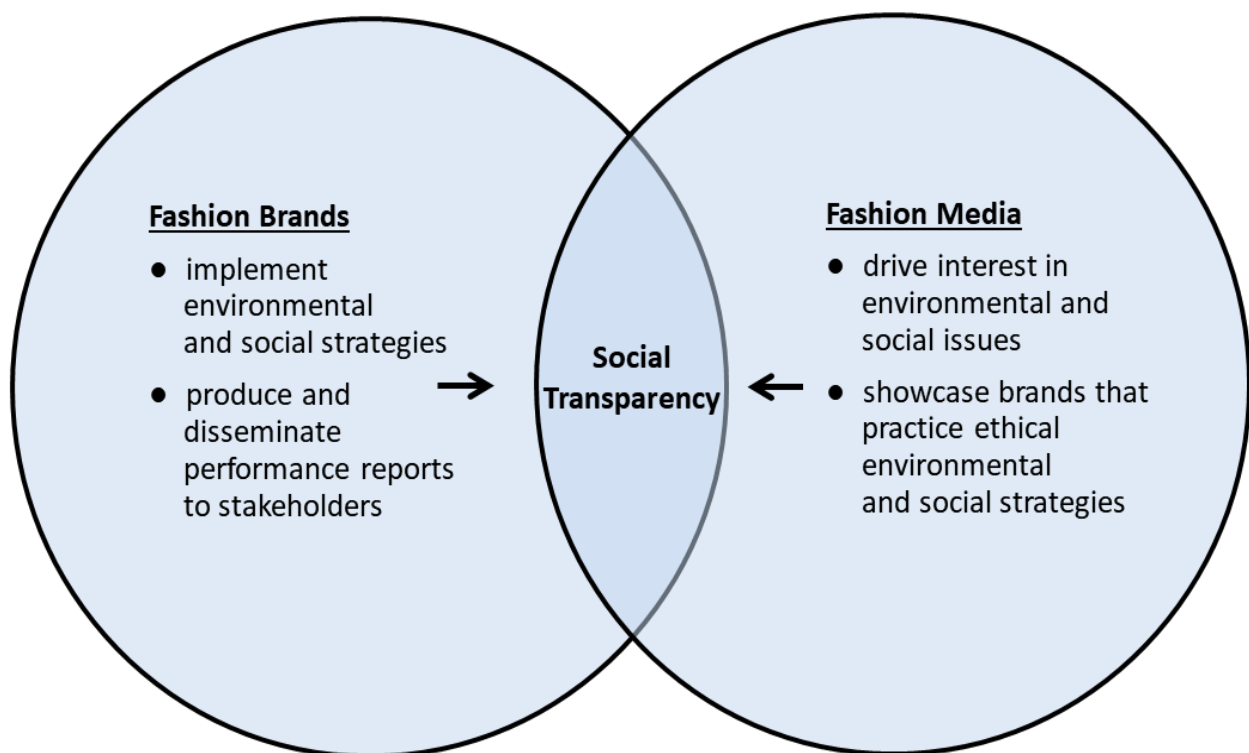
Fig. 1: The synergy between fashion brands and fashion media

3. Data and methodology

3.1 The fashion brand corpus

The initial sampling of brands to include in the corpus was based on the Fashion Transparency Index 2020 Edition (Fashion Revolution CIC, 2020). Fashion Revolution is a non-profit organization that produces a yearly ranking of 250 of the world's largest fashion brands and retailers according to their level of transparency in relation to environmental and social practices, policies and impacts. Relying on an already established index of fashion brands that highlights issues linked to social transparency made it possible to select the sample in a systematic and rational way that ensured alignment with the research topic. Indeed, the very definition of transparency offered by Fashion Revolution is formulated in terms of social transparency, where both the social and environmental dimensions clearly emerge. More specifically, it is defined as:

> The public disclosure of credible, comprehensive and comparable data and information about fashion's supply chains, business practices and the impacts of these practices on workers, communities and the environment. (Fashion Revolution CIC 2020)

To compile the fashion brand corpus, the websites of top-scoring brands on the index were searched to determine the availability of sustainability reports for the year 2020 in a .pdf format that could be freely downloaded. From these, I selected 10 of the highest-scoring brands or brand groups with different countries of origin, market segments, and product types in order to better represent the global fashion industry.[2] An overview of the corpus is shown in Table 1.

Brand	Country of origin	Market segment	Product type	Tokens
C&A	Germany	mass	clothing/accessories	23,017
H&M	Sweden	mass	clothing/accessories	36,103
Marks & Spencer	UK	mass	clothing/accessories	8,244
Esprit	Germany/Hong Kong	middle/mass	clothing/accessories	19,396
Gap	US	middle/mass	clothing	28,708
Lululemon	Canada	middle	sportswear	26,687
VF Corp	US	middle	outerwear	13,218
Nike	US	middle	sportswear	53,817
PVH	US	middle/attainable luxury	clothing	33,358
Gucci	Italy	old luxury	clothing/accessories	17,897
				263,313

Tab. 1: The Fashion Brand Corpus

As can be seen, the corpus includes several well-known brands that all operate on an international level, as well as two multi-brand groups representing a relatively common

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[2] Market segments and product types were retrieved from Fashionbi, a database for the global fashion and luxury markets based in Hong Kong: https://www.fashionbi.com/. Last viewed 12/07/2023.

business structure in the fashion industry. Specifically, VF corporation is the parent company of the sportswear brands The North Face, Timberland, Vans, and Wrangler, while PVH owns the brands Tommy Hilfiger, Bass, Izod, Van Heusen, and Arrow. From Table 1, the considerable variation in the length of the sustainability reports is also evident, indicating that the companies make individual choices in terms of content and the amount of detail to include. The reports tend to be highly polished and graphically sophisticated documents with extensive use of visual elements and attractive infographics. The downloaded .pdfs of the sustainability reports were converted into plain text files and compiled into the fashion brand corpus.

3.2 The fashion media dataset

If fashion brands represent the corporate side of fashion discourse, the fashion media as a specific variety of media discourse reflect its institutional side (Fetzer 2014). Fashion media have a vital function within the discourse community, given the aesthetic and innovative nature of the fashion product. However, the fashion media universe is large, eclectic and dispersive, with various types of publications including both print and digital resources (e.g., dedicated magazines, newspaper articles, blogs, websites) that may come and go, thus making it problematic to compile a range of textual resources similar in scope and structure to those of the fashion brand corpus. Therefore, to investigate social transparency in the fashion media, I opted to utilize textual materials from the website of Condé Nast,[3] which is considered to be a legacy global media organization (Shrivastava 2022). It is the owner of the iconic Vogue magazine, undoubtedly the world's most influential fashion publication since it was founded in the United States in 1909 and now published internationally in ten different editions, as well as other fashion-oriented magazines (*Glamour* and *GQ*). Since Condé Nast does not produce a downloadable sustainability report comparable to fashion brands, I collected all available texts from the various pages and links under the Sustainability and Diversity & Inclusion menus accessible from the homepage and compiled a dataset of 16,374 words. At the time of collection, the specific topics discussed on the website included 1) information labelled by Condé Nast as Phase 1 and Phase 2 of their current environmental and social initiatives, 2) information about a partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Fashion (CSF) to produce a sustainable fashion glossary, and 3) a case study on Condé Nast Spain. The textual materials collected from the website were compiled into the Condé Nast dataset and converted into a plain text file.

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[3] https://www.condenast.com/. Last visited 15/04/2023.

3.3 The analytical approach

The plain text files of the fashion brand corpus and Condé Nast dataset were then submitted to elaboration with Wmatrix (Rayson 2008), a software tool for corpus analysis and comparison that is particularly suitable for identifying themes of interest within textual data. The fashion brand corpus and Condé Nast dataset were compared to each other rather than to a general reference corpus. In this way, it was possible to more precisely tease out any highly distinguishing themes. This was accomplished through the automatic identification of both semantic domains (i.e., areas of meaning and the words encompassed within them) and keywords that occur with statistically higher frequency in one compared to other. Statistical significance is expressed in a keyness score at the 99% level of confidence ($p < 0.01$) calculated by the incorporated log likelihood test, which also takes into account size differences in linguistic data. The emerging items were then qualitatively analysed in relation to environmental and social themes addressed in context of social transparency in order identify trends and patterns of usage.

In the first step, the semantic annotation function was implemented to reveal the semantic domains present in the data. In this process, the software automatically assigns each lexical item to one of over 200 pre-established semantic domains and tags it with corresponding metadata. It was then possible to determine which semantic domains occurred with statistically higher frequencies, thereby allowing predominant themes related to social transparency to emerge. As the second step, using the same procedure of comparing the fashion brand corpus and the Condé Nast dataset to each other, I performed a keyword analysis to enable a more finely tuned picture of the linguistic manifestation of social transparency.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Semantic domain analysis

Wmatrix provides a cloud interface that allows for a streamlined and intuitive visual display of the results of comparative analyses. Figure 2 shows the semantic domain cloud for areas of meaning that were significantly more frequent in the fashion brand corpus compared to the Condé Naste dataset, while Figure 3 shows those that were significantly more frequent in the Condé Naste dataset compared to the fashion brand corpus. Although all the domains in the clouds have statistically higher frequencies, the larger the font, the higher the keyness score, meaning that those domains were strongly characteristic. By clicking on each domain, the corresponding concordance lines of all the lexical items assigned to it become visible, along with its relative keyness score.

Fig. 2: Semantic domain cloud of the fashion brand corpus vs. the Condé Nast dataset

Fig. 3: Semantic domain cloud of the Condé Nast dataset vs. the fashion brand corpus

Overall, the two clouds show very different semantic profiles. In Figure 2, particularly prominent domains include various types of substances, numbers, quantities, and selling in relation to business, which reflects the core activities of the fashion brands. Interestingly, the domain Drama,_the_theatre_and_show_business contained exclusively the lexical item *performance* which was used in the generic sense of accomplishment and clearly not in the theatrical sense. This result serves to demonstrate the limitations of automated analysis which, unlike the human mind, does not always accurately capture the nuances of meanings. In Figure 3, highly frequent domains involved entertainment, geographical terms, media, and communication, reflecting the over-arching focus of a globally present and influential media company. Here we can also notice the prominence of the domain Personal_names which contained proper nouns (e.g. *Condé Nast, Condé Nast Spain, Vogue, Vogue India*), as well as the names of people and celebrities (e.g., *Alexander Wang, Emma Watson, Naomi Campbell*) having some association with the fashion world, which is a characterizing feature of fashion journalism (Crawford Camiciottoli 2019; 2016).

Table 2 lists examples of the lexical items found with some domains illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. These were selected on the basis of conceptual alignment with the environmental and social themes of social transparency and could thus provide interesting interpretive insights.

Fashion brand corpus domains/*lexical items*	Condé Nast dataset domains/*lexical items*
Substances_materials (includes all sub-domains)/*carbon, cashmere, chemicals, cotton, fiber, nylon, plastics, polyester, raw materials, water, wools*	Green_issues/*deforestation, ecological, environment, environmentally friendly, nature, pollution, sustainability*
Life_and_living_things + Living_creatures:_animals_plants_birds_etc./*animal welfare, biodiversity, herds, organic, life-saving, wildlife*	Comparing:_varied/*diverse, diversity, varied*
Evaluation:_good/bad (includes all three levels)/*better, enhance, enriching, good, high-quality, improving, positive, progress*	Evaluation:_authentic/*authentic, authentically, first-hand, real life,*
	Speech:_communicative/*appeal, communication, conversations, discussions, voice*
	Belonging_to_a_group/*coalition, community, groups, members, public, organizations, teams*

Tab. 2: Lexical items within semantic domains: fashion brand corpus vs. Condé Nast dataset

As can be seen, in the fashion brand corpus, the content of the domains reflects an emphasis on the environmental dimension of social transparency, but with a very high degree of specificity related to materials and aspects of the manufacturing process. Surprisingly, Green_issues emerged as a key domain only in the Condé Nast dataset with items that referred to the environment either more generally or in terms of ecological problems to be resolved. What is also striking is the much stronger manifestation of the social dimension of social transparency in the Condé Nast dataset (e.g. *coalition, communication, community, conversations, diversity, teams, voice*) with respect to the fashion brand corpus. There was also an interesting difference in the semantic articulation of evaluation: Evaluation:_good/bad in the fashion brand corpus to put the companies' own performance in an exclusively positive light (e.g. *Good progress has also been made on packaging with 77% of our packaging now widely recyclable/Marks & Spencer*) vs. Evaluation:_authentic in Condé Nast in contexts to encourage people to be authentic and true to themselves (e.g. *Condé Nast will continue to foster inclusivity by empowering individuals to always be authentically themselves*).

4.2 Keyword analysis

The same procedure of setting the fashion brand corpus and the Condé Nast dataset against each other resulted in the keywords clouds illustrated in Figures 4 and 5. Once again, we can observe very different lexical profiles, even if the keywords largely converge with the previously identified key semantic domains shown in Figures 2 and 3.

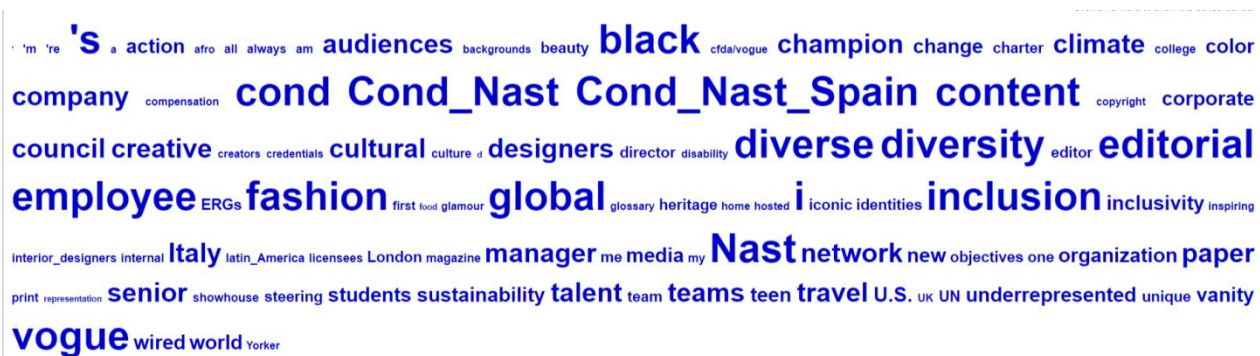**Fig. 4:** Keyword cloud of the fashion brand corpus vs. the Condé Nast dataset

Fig. 5: Keyword cloud of the fashion brand corpus vs. the Condé Nast dataset

Focusing first on the words that appear with significantly higher frequency in the fashion brand corpus (Figure 4), many items could be linked to the environmental dimension of social transparency. A careful examination of their corresponding concordance lines revealed some interesting trends that will be illustrated below through a series of examples in context. Examples 1 and 2 refer to manufacturing processes that aim to avoid causing damage or harm to people and the environment, as encoded in the keywords *water, improve, wastewater, chemicals, management, hazardous, manufacturing*, while examples 3 and 4 highlight the effort to reduce waste and promote recycling with the keywords *circular, recycle, apparel supply chain, circularity*. Examples 5, 6 and 7 call attention to environmentally-friendly materials used to manufacture the fashion products with the keywords *materials, denim, organic, recycled, cotton, clothing*, and *cashmere*. All of these examples further demonstrate a clustering tendency in which multiple keywords are found in close proximity within a short stretch of text, thereby enhancing the rhetorical effect. Also of note is the presence of the keywords *we* and/or *our*, reflecting the broadly self-promotional tone of the texts.

(1)   Our Water Quality Program (WQP): we actively monitor and *improve wastewater* quality. The program has evolved to include *chemicals management*, a key component of *water* quality. (Gap)

(2)   We are proud [...] to have a leadership role in the work to eliminate the discharge of *hazardous chemicals* in fashion *manufacturing*. (Esprit)

(3)   The Nike Grind program [...] cutting edge of developing *circular* waste systems to reuse and *recycle* material waste from our footwear and *apparel supply chain*. (Nike)

(4)   In accordance with our Circulator tool, our brands launched collections designed for *circularity*. (H&M)

(5)   [...] with 69% of the collection made from sustainable *materials*, including raw *denim*, *organic* and *recycled cotton* and plastic-free packaging. (PVH)

(6)   We adopted a policy of sourcing 100% sustainable *cotton* for M&S *clothing*. M&S sustainable *cotton* included *materials* sourced through the Better *Cotton* Initiative, *organic* and *recycled*. (M&S)

(7)   During the year, 60% of the *cashmere clothing* offered in our stores was *Cashmere* Standard-certified, helping to promote *cashmere* production that is measurably better for animals, the environment and herding communities. (C&A)

In the fashion brand corpus, there was a recurring combination of the two keywords *people* and *planet* as illustrated in the sample of fifteen concordance lines in Figure 6. Expressions formulated with these lexical items seem to act as a compact phrasal structure to summarize in a nutshell the fashion brands' approach to communicating social transparency. *People* and *planet* are also part of what Stibbe (2020, 2) describes as the "triple bottom line" (i.e. *people*, *planet,* and *profit)* often used to define sustainability, thus reinforcing their collocational nature. As can be seen, the combination was used not only in running text, but also apparently as section headings or titles (lines 1 and 3), resulting in a certain degree of repetitiveness and redundancy.

```
1  m Our Leadership Introduction The   Planet   The People Our Performance Our Repo
2  t of increasing challenges to our   planet   and its people , we have to build o
3  them called We Care for People &     Planet   . This reflects our fundamental com
4  commitment towards caring for the    planet   and its people . We are working to
5  People Our Performance Our Report    Planet   C &A's; Environmental Stewardship
6  le Our Performance Our Report The    Planet   10 #3 From Our Leadership Introduct
7  ducts are safe for people and the    planet   . Our goal is to foster a supply ch
8  ing we do. We care for people &      planet. We are consumer-obsessed . We keep
9  force for good for people and our    planet   . Gaps purpose is to create sustain
10 better world for people and the    planet   . thred UP : Banana Republic partner
11 the betterment of people and the   planet in its own unique ways. We're purpose
12 the betterment of people and the   planet, and our health and safety program is
13  and re-connecting to people and   planet through its timeless designs. Kipling
14 ustainable future for people and   planet. As part of its commitment to fosteri
15 three purpose pillars, people,     planet and play. As a committee, we have bee
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Fig. 6: Examples of concordance lines with people and planet in the fashion brand corpus

Concerning the social dimension of social transparency, the keywords in the fashion brand corpus referred to specific programs, partnerships, and alliances dedicated to eradicating gender-based stereotypes and violence in examples 8 and 9 (*partnership, gender-based, gender-based violence*) and to promoting opportunities for girls in examples 10 to 11 (*leadership, opportunity, girls, empowering, wellbeing*).

(8)   We joined a three-year *partnership* with the Unstereotype Alliance (UA), a platform seeking to eradicate harmful *gender-based* stereotypes in marketing, advertising and communications. (C&A)

(9)   VF published its Commitment to Eradicating *Gender-Based Violence* and Harassment (GBVH). (VF)

(10)   […] the private sector lead on the Feminist Movements & Leadership Action Coalition to accelerate equality, *leadership* and *opportunity* for women and *girls* worldwide (Gucci)

(11)   Global initiatives include support for the *Girls Opportunity* Alliance, a program of the Obama Foundation *empowering girls* through *wellbeing* and education (Lululemon)

Shifting now to the keywords identified in the Condé Nast dataset (Figure 5), the environmental perspective of social transparency was encoded in the keyword *climate* as illustrated in examples 12 and 13. In examples 14 and 15, the keyword *change* is used in relation to environmental sustainability practices, but also in a more generic cultural sense in

line with the impact of the fashion media on modern culture (Mora et al. 2014). The latter is further reinforced by the presence of other conceptually related keywords: *iconic* and *cultural* in example 15.

(12)   Our brands are becoming increasingly proactive in covering the *climate* crisis and biodiversity issues.

(13)   We launched the Sustainable Fashion Glossary with the London College of Fashion to strength the fashion industry's understanding of sustainable fashion and the sector's role in addressing the *climate* crisis.

(14)   Our Sustainability Global Employee Council developed and activated […] and internal program that celebrates content creators across the company who are raising awareness around sustainability and creating meaningful, impactful content that inspires *change*.

(15)   For more than a century, our *iconic* brands have driven the *cultural* conversation, sparked global movements and propelled meaningful *change* around the world.

The important role of the fashion media in informing and engaging consumers is seen in examples 16 and 17 where we see the keyword *audiences* in combination with *sustainability* and *change*. In examples 18, 19, and 20, the emphasis on the social themes of transparency previously identified in the key semantic domain analysis (see section 3.1) is reinforced in the keywords *diversity, inclusion, inclusivity, representation, diverse, talent,* and *underrepresented*. However, examples 21 and 22 bring to light a particular facet of social transparency that could not be identified by observing the key semantic domain cloud in Figure 2. The keywords *black* and *color* shown in Figure 5 were contained in the domain Colour_and_colour_patterns (Figure 2). However, they actually referred to ethnic minorities, especially the word *black* with reference to African Americans. This discrepancy again points to the limitations of automated analysis without follow-up human intervention for a more meaningful interpretation.

(16)   […] connect with new and young *audiences* who concern themselves with matters of *sustainability* and the protection of the environment.

(17)   Our goal is to mitigate our global environmental footprint, while using our influence to inform our *audiences* and foster positive *change*.

(18)   Vogue Japan's Vogue Change initiative provides a dedicated, ongoing editorial program tackling subjects such as *diversity,* gender and *inclusion.*

(19)   Cond Nast commits to *inclusivity* and equal gender *representation* in events it organizes or sponsors.

(20)   The Commercial Revenue team […] efforts to retain *diverse talent* and strengthen our ties to historically *underrepresented* communities.

(21)   Across our U.S. workforce, 41% of all new hires identify as people of *color*, increasing our total population by 4%.

(22)   A few topics covered in 2020 included investing in *Black* owned businesses , the impact of COVID on *Black* and minority communities, LGBTQ+ Parenting, Stop Asian Hate , the Matter of *Black* Lives.

4.3 Supplementary analysis: transparen*

To conclude this section, I would like to briefly discuss an item that, somewhat surprisingly, did not emerge in any of the contrastive analyses described above, namely, *transparency*. Although it was present in both the fashion brand corpus and the Condé Nast dataset, there was no significant difference in terms of keyness. This was rather surprising given that one of their primary aims is to project an image of social transparency. For this reason, it seemed worthwhile to look more closely at how this particular item was actually used. On a quantitative level, the lemma *transparen** was somewhat more frequent in the fashion brand corpus (N=146, 0.55 occurrences pttw) as compared to the Condé Nast dataset (N=5, 0.31 occurrences pttw). However, on a qualitative level, there were some noticeable differences. In the fashion brand corpus, *transparency* tends to refer to the provision of information about manufacturing processes in relation to environmental performance, representing a goal to achieve or even a work-in-progress, as suggested in examples 23-26. Example 27 offers an example of how *transparency* also appeared in intertextual references to the *Fashion Transparency Index*, which occurred multiple times in the corpus. Evidently, brands that are included in the index are quite keen to spotlight this coveted achievement.

(23)   We are working toward creating a more *transparent* ecosystem within PVH, with our vendors and partners, as well as with NGOs and governments. (PVH)

(24)   We aim to enhance *transparency*, set more ambitious targets, and improve water impacts across our supply chain. (Gap)

(25)   We will continue to be *transparent* about how we calculate our emissions, learning and adapting our approach as methods improve. (H&M)

(26)   We have committed to an unprecedented level of openness and honesty, starting with *transparency* about our supply chain. (C&A)

(27)   Esprit has ranked top 10 in the Fashion Transparency Index by Fashion Revolution for 4 consecutive years. (Esprit)

In contrast, the five occurrences of *transparen** in the Condé Nast dataset mostly emphasize the social and human dimension of social transparency, as illustrated in examples 28-30 that discuss transparency in terms of initiatives related to employees, leaders, and partners. In example 30, the use of the expression "sustainability literacy" is in line with the role of fashion media to educate consumers (Denisova 2021). Example 31 instead refers specifically to the climate challenge, thus also reflecting the environmental dimension. Example 32 is a particularly interesting case in which *transparent* actually encodes its literal meaning (i.e., the transparent plastic wrapping used for magazines), even if the overall message is still related to safeguarding the environment by reducing the use of plastics. Moreover, we also see what appears to be a concession on the part of Condé Nast that has not yet succeeded in eliminating plastic from its print publications.

(28)   We are making important investments in the human resources tools, processes and practices that create *transparency*, fairness and equity for all Condé Nast employees around the world.

(29)   As a company, we started with a commitment from our senior leaders, who acknowledge that accountability and *transparency* are critical components to delivering actionable, sustainable change.

(30) Key Actions: […] Continue to work with partners to champion *transparency* and sustainability literacy.

(31) In 2020, we published our first cross-market GHG emissions assessment results, against a 2018 baseline. We have committed to disclosing this information to be completely *transparent* and accountable for our contribution to the ongoing climate challenge.

(32) There are still barriers to switching away from plastic, not least because it is a versatile solution for newsstand copies of our titles as it is *transparent*, economical and flexible.

In sum, *transparen** is not a distinctive lemma in either the fashion brand corpus or the Condé Nast dataset. However, its usage is generally in alignment with the trends that emerged from both the semantic domain and keyword analyses in terms of greater or lesser emphasis on the environmental or social aspects of social transparency, as discussed throughout this section.

5. Concluding remarks

Returning to the research question posed at the outset, the overall difference in how social transparency is conveyed by fashion brands vs. fashion media can be summarized as follows: more environmentally and less socially oriented for the fashion brands vs. more socially and less environmentally oriented for fashion media. Moreover, the relatively limited information dealing with social themes in the fashion brand corpus referred to participation in formal initiatives to promote gender equality and did not address other areas of social concern. In contrast, the environmental themes that did emerge in the Condé Nast dataset revolved around climate activism, also highlighting its ideological perspective. As a result, the presence of conceptually related and overlapping semantic domains and keywords within each of the two communicative settings created substantially different narratives of social transparency. On the one hand, in the fashion industry there is a focus on demonstrating efforts towards safe and efficient supply chains and manufacturing processes while promoting innovation and ethical behaviours to protect the environment. On the other hand, in the fashion media there is great attention to diversity, inclusion and climate change, not only to raise awareness but also to advocate for change. On the whole, these distinctive emerging narratives appear to be well aligned with their diverse roles within the global fashion industry: implementing and

reporting environmental and social strategies on the part of fashion brands vs. driving awareness of and interest in environmental and social issues on the part of the fashion media (Figure 1).

To conclude, the findings of this analysis can have pedagogical applications in courses dealing with business communication in general and fashion writing in particular. When teaching business communication, it is imperative to include content and activities that deepen students' understanding of social transparency, while introducing them to the reporting practices used by companies to promote their efforts (Tammelin 2009). In fashion writing education, topics such as cultural appropriation, diversity, and sustainability are now being addressed in teaching materials (Manley and Slone 2022). Therefore, aspiring professionals in both of these areas could benefit from teaching methodologies that utilize the type of authentic materials from professional sustainability reporting and fashion media communications that have been investigated in this study. This will allow them to develop awareness of how to effectively communicate social transparency to specific discourse communities, while also learning to critically evaluate existing narratives in order to avoid communicative pitfalls such as redundancy and lack of attention to crucial societal concerns.

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Bionote

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