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FASHION BRAND: ROLE OF IMAGE IN FASHION MARKETING

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In the article we are going, firstly, to give a sketchy review of the fashion phenomenon in Belarus that has been changing dramatically. Modern Belarusian fashion industry is based on the state owned large scale production clusters engaged in light industry inherited from the USSR; mid-sized and small private manufactures specialized mostly on processing feedstock and mass-market clothing aiming at neighboring and local markets, and independent designers working in artisanal formats.

Primarily Belarusian and also Russian mass media and advertising community geared public interest towards local fashion stories. A few years ago one could not observe such a huge informational activity in the media on the topic of fashion in our country. Though, Belarusian professional fashion community admits that our fashion business is in its infancy period. There are a few local private design- and manufacturing companies that are considered to have successful business stories here. And they are Milavitsa, Mattioli, design studios of Ivan Aiplatov, Olga Samoschenko, Pavel Panaskin, Lena Tsokalenko and a few others.

Our second focus is concentrated on the outcomes of our research devoted to understanding of communication processes, which take place in modern fashion business. We, particularly, have been interested in the impact of visualization, or in other words, visual image in communicating of a fashion-brand. Case in point: commercials of the Mattioli fashion brand and perception of their visual component.

The key objectives of the study presented in the article are the following:
- to review the current trends in the development of fashion business;
- to explore the communication process of a fashion brand;
- to find out the most popular and efficient tools of communication of a fashion brand;
- to recognize the importance of visualization in fashion communication;
- to analyze perception of visual component in the commercial message of the Mattioli fashion brand.

Let us introduce a few definitions vital for understanding the domain of the study.

Fashion industry is defined as a multi-leveled business activities aimed at

designing, producing, promoting and selling a fashion-object. Fashion today is not just a pleasant part of elite life style; it is a global industry and a core economic factor of the GDP of many countries.

Fashion industry's major focus is a fashion object. Traditionally, *fashion-object* means clothes, shoes, and accessories.

A *fashion-object is defined as*:

• an ephemeral one which is a subject to change, obsolescence, and eventual replacement by «newer» objects;

• accepted mostly due to its qualities than due to its utility;

• a symbol of «collective tastes» of definite communities that have adopted them;

• is characterized by eye-catching newness and therefore becomes «exclusive» or superlative when compared to those already existing and accepted fashion objects. [1, p. 466]

Fashion-object specificity:

• causes seasonality;

• causes fashion trends change;

• defines trends in social and cultural environment;

• is connected to arts;

• modifies specific role of a designer in brand building;

• guides compatibility of clothes and accessory policy;

• causes fusion of clothes. [3, p. 19]

Once we defined characteristics of fashion object, we need to understand how to communicate a fashion brand, because brand is based on its object. *Fashion brand communication process* is an interaction with consumers aimed at sharing information about the brand in oral or written forms, making the core idea of a brand clear to consumers, and be taken by the masses as a guide to act. [4, p. 21]

Interaction of the fashion brand with a consumer is built on a variety of *communication tools* both standard (advertising in glossy magazines, sales promotion programs) and specific, relevant only within fashion industry (fashion shows and presentations of new collections at fashion weeks, collaborations with arts and other businesses of B2C type). [2]

For our particular study we have chosen and analyzed perception-and-feedback of visual component in the commercial message addressing the target audience of the Mattioli fashion brand.

We have applied a modified Charles Osgood questionnaire (see the table). We have questioned more than 55 respondents. They were Russian-speaking women aged 16 – 25 years, who were already earning their own living or were sustained by their parents.

The respondents described by 12 scales their ideal advertising image of

women's bags. Then we proposed them to view and reflect on a set of commercials of Mattioli. Their reflection process was arranged in working on a questionnaire.

12-scale semantic differencial

Adjective	Assessment							Adjective
	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	
Modern								Classic
Mature								Young
Discreet								Salient
Sincere								Mysterious
Elegant								Ordinary
Aggressive								Sensual
Serious								Romantic
Original								Banal
Casual								Fancy
Quiet								Active
Sophisticated								Vague
Primitive								Refined

As a result we have found out that the illustration №1 (see pic. 1) is closer in perception to the so-called *ideal image*.

The first illustration is characterized as «sensual», «elegant», «discreet», «mysterious» and «sophisticated». On the other hand, this illustration appears to be «primitive» and «ordinary». The research has revealed a few differences between the «ideal» image and the real illustration №2 (see pic. 2). The respondents have found the illustration №2 to be less «romantic», more «vague» and even «aggressive». At the same time similarity is stated in such characteristics as «modernity», «mystery», «originality» and «sophistication». We would like to admit that both illustrations №1 and №2 have turned to be more «mature», while the ideal image balances between the characteristics of «mature» and «young».

Summary in brief:

Fashion brand communication process involves a variety of communication tools. While choosing tools for specific communication goals, it is necessary to be guided by three criteria important for fashion industry: *time* needed for the target audience to percept message; *frequency* of contacts with the target audience and visual communication potential of each tool as soon as a properly designed visual image needs time (1) to *distinguish* the fashion brand from its competitors, (2) to *ensure* effective communication with a consumer, and (3) to *sell* a hardly differentiated fashion-object.

We have found that the *Mattioli fashion brand* uses the world accepted communication strategy and adapts it to the Belarusian fashion market. Meanwhile Mattioli doesn't implement the segmentation of the target audience and creates universal visual components for the commercials, which in some cases don't correlate with the audience conception of the ideal advertising image. That might prevent effective brand communication with a consumer.

Pic. 1

Pic. 2

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