



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

THE POWER OF FASHION AND THE FASHIONING OF POWER –
ANALYZING A FACET OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY THAT IMPACTED
ON THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SCENE IN 2020.

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to
obtain a Master's Degree in Culture Studies – Management of the
Arts and Culture

By

Leonor Gomes de Castro Morais Loureiro

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

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Under the supervision of Luísa Leal de Faría

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Resumo

Vivemos num mundo que é sobretudo moldado por imagens, fazendo da moda um definidor universal de poder e estatuto. No aproximar da eleição presidencial de 2020 nos Estados Unidos, a situação pandémica forçou a indústria da moda a repensar as suas estratégias e responsabilidades, sublinhando o da indústria para se tornar um agente transformador num mundo politicamente polarizado.

Este foi o tema escolhido uma vez que a moda se tem tornado cada vez mais entrelaçada com a política, neste caso nos Estados Unidos, estabelecendo jogos de poder que se traduzem em mudanças na cultura popular americana e, por consequência da globalização, em todo o mundo. Marcas e designers estão cada vez mais investidos em tomar uma posição em relação a questões políticas, posicionando-se frequentemente em qualquer um dos dois lados opostos. Como o contexto está em constante mudança, devido à evolução da pandemia, bem como ao impacto global dos resultados das eleições, perguntamo-nos de que forma a materialização da moda reflete as questões geopolíticas à escala global, dado que a articulação de ideias materiais e abstratas é flexível e tem múltiplas possibilidades de interpretações e representações. Por conseguinte, este estudo visa examinar a relevância do setor da moda nas Eleições Presidenciais de 2020, vivendo simultaneamente uma pandemia global. Além disso, ao relacioná-lo com literatura relevante a fim de acrescentar à discussão global, iremos perguntar: de que forma e em que medida é a moda um instrumento de mudança, para além do ato de se comprar artigos simbólicos e com “estilo”?

Palavras-chave

Moda; política; Eleições Presidenciais dos Estados Unidos; poder; mundo polarizado; imagens; significados.

Abstract

We live in a world that is mostly shaped by imagery, making fashion a universal definer of power and status. While approaching the 2020 Presidential Election in the United States, the pandemic situation forced the fashion industry to rethink its strategies and responsibilities, underlining the industry's potential to become a transforming agent in a politically polarized world.

The topic was chosen as fashion has become more and more intertwined with politics, in this case, in North America, establishing power plays that translate into changes in the American popular culture and, by consequence of globalization, around the world. Specific brands and designers are increasingly invested in taking a stand towards political issues, often positioning themselves on either one of the two polar opposite sides. As the context is ever-changing, due to the evolution of the pandemic, as well as the global impact of the results of the election, we wonder in what ways does the materialization of fashion reflect the geopolitical issues on a global scale, given that the articulation of material and abstract ideas is flexible and gives many possibilities for interpretations and representations. Therefore, this study aims at examining the relevance of the fashion sector in the 2020 Presidential Election, while living a global pandemic. Furthermore, by relating it to relevant literature in order to add to the global discussion, we will ask: in which ways and to what extent is fashion a tool for social change, beyond the act of purchasing symbolic and stylish items?

Keywords

Fashion; politics; United States Presidential Election; power; polarized world; imagery; meanings.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research paper seeks to explore the intricate relationship between fashion, politics, and culture within the context of the 2020 Presidential Election in the United States. The aim of this study is to investigate the way fashion both reflects and impacts geopolitical issues on a global scale. By examining the role of fashion in expressing political and social perspectives, we will assess its potential as a catalyst for societal change beyond the mere consumption of symbolic and fashionable items.

i. Objectives.

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

- To investigate the interplay between fashion and politics in the lead-up to the 2020 Presidential Election in the United States.
- To analyze the role of fashion as a medium of political expression and its impact on American popular culture.
- To examine how specific fashion brands and designers positioned themselves on the political spectrum and its implications for their global image.
- To explore the relevance of fashion as a catalyst for social change beyond consumerism.

ii. Relevance of the work.

The relevance of this work is in how it contributes to the understanding of the ever-evolving relationship between fashion and politics during a period marked by intensified political divisions and worldwide challenges, such as the Covid-19 epidemic. This study examines how fashion may have affected the 2020 US Presidential Election and how it might influence social and political change. This investigation shows how fashion may impact public discourse, challenge conventions, and promote action and advocacy.

We argue that this research has important implications for fashion industry stakeholders, lawmakers, activists, and scholars interested in the complicated interaction between fashion, culture, and politics. This study provides valuable insights for fashion businesses aiming to actively participate in political matters, emphasizing the significance of adopting responsible and ethical practices in an era characterized by swift transformations.

iii. Structure and contribution to research.

The present thesis is structured into seven parts, whereby each chapter is dedicated to examining distinct facets of the correlation between fashion and politics within the framework of the 2020 Presidential Election. The chapters have been structured in a manner that fosters a holistic comprehension of the intricate relationship between these two realms. This includes an exploration of historical contexts, theoretical frameworks, empirical investigations, and the practical ramifications that arise from this crossing of domains.

We will first contextualize the relationship between fashion and politics by alluding to its origins and understanding where it stands today. We will then investigate fashion symbols in politics and political symbols in fashion, from a semiotics point of view, and use visual analysis to question the importance of aesthetics for the creation of meaning.

Later, we will discuss the concept of “protest-dressing” by briefly analyzing concrete examples of political movements by means of fashion, such as the #MeToo movement or the Women’s Rights Movement by the congresswomen dressing in white. We will cross it with other significant concepts, such as “power-dressing”. As well as introducing the concept of “costuming”, illustrating with the now common usage of face masks, which may reflect the performative dimension of fashion and eventually evaluate in which way it plays a role in politics.

Finally, we will be analyzing in more depth the case of Fashion Our Future, an initiative developed by a group of American designers and professionals from the American fashion industry to incite youth voter registration for the 2020 Presidential Election.

Overall, the main goal is to investigate in which ways the materialization of fashion reflects geopolitical issues on a global scale. Moreover, we find it important to understand the relevance of the fashion industry in the 2020 American Presidential Election, while living a global pandemic. Finally, we must answer the question: how is fashion a tool for change, beyond the act of purchasing symbolic and stylish items in the current context?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In general, this chapter showcases the literature review around the proposed theme and contextualizes historically its contours. I will start by discussing recent developments to assess their impact on the 2020 US political scene.

- i. Election year. Covid-19 year. Fashion statement year?

The 2020 year was anything but predictable. From the global pandemic that has killed thousands of people and left millions out of jobs, to the uprising protest movements against race discrimination in the United States, to perhaps the most controversial Presidential Election in American history. One may wonder, what does fashion have to do with it? As it turns out, a lot more than one might think, as fashion is inherently political, it holds a mirror to the present times. The creativeness of fashion may be “used to express patriotic, nationalistic, propagandistic tendencies as well as complex issues related to class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality” (Singer, 2020). Fashion is one of the most accessible ways one can express oneself, their values, and beliefs, simply because the vast majority of people have access to their own bodies and how to portray themselves. Even the decision to not care about fashion can be interpreted as a political statement. Designers are now not limiting themselves just to create beautiful garments, but also to convey a message that introduces change.

With the intensification of a fraught political environment, brands have struggled to remain neutral. They are engaging in politics more than ever and attempting, alongside their customers, to navigate the current global “culture wars”. Young consumers are now much more acutely aware of the issues surrounding them and are paying attention to the fashion industry’s responses, making them own past mistakes and apply significant changes to address political issues openly, thus striving for a cultural shift through fashion. There are obviously some risks when it comes to engaging with politics and, in 2020, non-engagement or compliance was one of the “deal-breakers” for brands when it came to positioning themselves on a certain political topic, whether it would be Black Lives

Matter¹, the climate change crisis or gender rights. Young customers are looking for clothes that can represent them, and when brands align their political actions with their supposed values, the consumers take notice and tend to believe that that brand is much more authentic and reliable.

“Vote” was one of the most conveyed messages throughout apparel items during 2020. From pop stars wearing dresses with the word “vote” on them on red carpets, such as Lizzo at the Billboard Music Awards, to Michelle Obama wearing a necklace spelling “Vote” during a conference, to retail chains such as Nordstrom and Levi’s as well as designers like Stuart Weitzman or Michael Kors getting involved with youth organizations to get young people to vote. Apparently, this strategy had some influence, since the turnout of “youngsters” was a lot higher than in previous elections.

The 2020 election panorama is completely redesigning the way the fashion industry looks at their responsibilities and getting them to be more present in the way they address political agendas. In the 2016 presidential election, American fashion designers did something unprecedented: they pledged and promoted the Democratic Party very publicly. Going as far as creating products to support Hillary Clinton’s campaign and even holding fundraisers for the candidate, an initiative taken by the Council of Fashion Designers of America. The supporting designers included Marc Jacobs, Tory Burch, Prabal Gurung and Joseph Altuzarra. Vogue magazine and its editor Anna Wintour even endorsed Mrs. Clinton, and so did Cindy Leive, editor of Glamour magazine.

Up until this point, the fashion industry was fearful of demonstrating any biases regarding its political positioning, identifying as conservative or liberal, and afraid of alienating potential customers. However, the past administration, under the harboring wing of Michelle Obama, developed a deep connection with the industry, where the First Lady used her position to showcase and uplift American Designers. This meant that the possibility of having a future female President representing the already female-dominated industry was quite appealing and viewed almost as a “promise” that the special relationship between the White House and American designers would continue (Friedman, 2020). However, as soon as President Trump took office, the relationship between American fashion and politicians was “broken”. Ever since the results of the 2016 Presidential

¹ Black Lives Matter is a worldwide movement that campaigns against violence towards black people. The movement was born in 2013 in the United States after several events of police brutality against young black citizens.

election came out, many designers voiced that they would not support either dress the new First Lady, Melania Trump. At this point, the focus was not so much on promoting democracy but rather the discussion was centered around accessorizing a specific politician.

Considering the events of 2020, from the pandemic to the killing of George Floyd² and subsequent protests, the fashion industry took charge of its influence and harnessed the power of social media to “drive civic involvement” (Friedman, 2020). Leading up to the event, many forms of political movements through fashion have been displayed.

One of the most evident examples refers to the moment when Hollywood stars took to social media their best “political pink” looks. “The bright *fuchsia* color has been conscripted to represent activism and political change” (Tassios, 2020). Evidently, pink is already a color associated with femininity, and in this case, the usage of this color promotes gender equality and political action. The advocates for this movement include the Supermajority members, an organization created by representatives of Black Lives Matter, National Domestic Workers Alliance and Planned Parenthood.

Another accessory heavily charged with symbolism is the red cap. During Trump’s campaign in 2016, the plain baseball cap suffered a radical transformation becoming “one of the most politicized items of clothing in the world” (Tassios, 2020). The cap embroidered with the slogan “Make America Great Again” became a worldwide symbol for Trump supporters and right-wing Republicans. As the then President of the United States campaigned for reelection, this accessory seemed to have evolved into a synonym of white supremacy and repression.

Moreover, female politicians have been increasingly embracing their style icon status, using their fashion choices as “weapons” in their arsenal. The conscient choices of what clothes to wear, by anyone, but especially by politicians can have great meaning and power. Although, female politicians are more likely to have a tricky relationship with fashion, constantly subjected to scrutiny, unequal in measure to men’s. “There’s no doubt that fashion is made an object of political fascination. But a generation of women in power are using it to their advantage, taking back control of something that was for so long used as a weapon to distance them from the very idea of their profession” (Zand, 2021). We may

² George Floyd was an African American citizen who was murdered by a Caucasian police officer in Minneapolis in 2020. The officer used brutal force by kneeled on his neck, strangulating Floyd to death.

depict five women in Washington who have been trailblazers in the world of politics with their unapologetic fashion statements in 2020: Hilary Clinton, Michelle Obama, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Nancy Pelosi and Kamala Harris, all from the left-wing party.

Furthermore, it is not possible to talk about the year 2020 without mentioning the newest and trendiest required accessory: face masks. With the development of the global pandemic, the mask became of advised usage, for public safety reasons, to prevent the spreading of the virus. However, many decided to make a statement with it. The very choice of wearing one or not could be considered a political assertion. Others preferred to display the word “vote” on them to promote the civic duty of voting. Many designs and patterns became available from several brands whose profits from selling the masks reverted to non-profit organizations.

It is now evident that the year 2020 was heavily charged with political movements through the means of fashion. One could say that it has even become a new world order to use fashion as a political tool. “Beauty, fashion, and politics have long been intertwined, with certain colors, hairstyles, and silhouettes being deployed as semiotics throughout history” (Benson, 2020).

ii. How deep is the bond between fashion and politics?

The convergence of fashion and politics has a lengthy and intricate history. This chapter examines the roots of this crossroads and how clothing and style have been functioning as instruments for political expression and communication throughout history. This research investigates how fashion has affected political discourse, from the regal garments worn by kings to the symbolic significance of “protest dressing”.

Fashion has undergone a transformation, evolving from a basic necessity to a complex method of communication and self-expression. The primary role of early clothing was mostly utilitarian, serving to provide protection against various environmental conditions. Nevertheless, as time progressed, clothes gradually obtained symbolic and expressive importance (Kaiser, 2012). During the latter part of the 19th century, the introduction of *haute-couture* signified a pivotal moment in the realm of fashion, as renowned designers elevated garments to the status of artistic expression (Steele, 2010).

In, fact, the history of the link between fashion and politics is as ancient as the existence of a societal system, where a group develops a range of codes and rules relating to the way of dressing that reflects the morals and beliefs of a group, their geographical location, their gender or even their profession or activity. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “fashion” firstly as “the prevailing style (as in dress) during a particular time” (“fashion”, 2021), secondly as “a prevailing custom, usage, or style” (“fashion”, 2021) and finally as a “social standing or prominence especially as signalized by dress or conduct” (“fashion”, 2021). “Fashion occurs when society at large agrees to a style, aesthetic or cultural sensibility for a period of time”. In fact, one may classify fashion as a social practice that begins the second we are born.

According to Svenja Bethke and Nathalie Keigel (2019), scholars became interested in the emerging field around the 1980’s and often look at the discipline through a multidisciplinary lens. Evidently, this information is inaccurate since studies about the field of fashion can be found from as early as the 1960’s. Still, fashion as a discipline may contribute to several other areas such as art history, culture studies, social studies, gender studies, visual culture, anthropology and so on. Fashion’s role in society has underlined its significance as a cultural phenomenon. Pierre Bourdieu argues that the importance of fashion varies according to one’s social and economic status, meaning that the recognition and demand rises according to one’s level of income (Bourdieu, 1984: 30). He then further argues that the chosen attire of the working class is likely to be more functional and durable clothing and not so focused on being aesthetically pleasing.

It is inevitable to claim that the knowledge, production and understanding of fashion varies according to the country it is practiced in. Bourdieu hints that the knowledge and perception of fashion depends on one’s *habitus*³, “everything, object or idea within a culture only has meaning in relation to other elements in that culture” (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002:34). Additionally, Amy de la Haye claims that fashion can no longer be undermined as “trivial, unworthy and even -as used to be the case - immoral” (De La Haye, 1999:7).

³ The *habitus* is an organized system by which individuals perceive and interact with the social environment surrounding them, in terms of social class, religion, education, ethnicity and occupancy. Also known as “incorporated cultural capital”. This concept was developed by Pierre Bourdieu and is considered by him a form of power. The *habitus* is thus a set of norms that unifies and/or separates people, goods, choices, consumptions, and practices.

Interestingly enough, the 1980's were a decade that marked fashion and politics, separately. The 1980's fashion was possibly one of the boldest eras in modern fashion history, easily recognizable for its over-the-top silhouettes, puffed shoulders, teased perms, power suits, spandex leggings, leg warmers, velour, all in highly saturated colors. At the same time, the Republican Ronald Reagan was voted president and the American culture peaked into a proud political and social conservatism. The decade remained typified as the "power dressing"⁴ era.

Therefore, while analyzing the impact of fashion on cultural identities, one should take into account not only the *habitus* and cultural fields that shape the stances on the discipline but also consider the political circumstances at the moment in time. Throughout history, one can witness a wide variety of events where clothing played a role in providing visual currency to socio political movements, varying from casual to utilitarian, as a uniform or to express individuality. The important thing is to convey a message. "Fashion's sizeable social scope and requisite expiration date is what makes it so useful as a marker of time" (Delgado, 2018).

Before Covid-19, the fashion industry was a 2.5 trillion-dollar business and employed over 1.8 million people in the United States alone (Singer, 2020). Hence, the social and economic impact that the industry implies on American culture is major. Still, the question persists: Can fashion be political? The simplest reply is: "Wasn't it always?" (Singer, 2020). In History, there are countless examples of moments where fashion played an important role in politics. From the Middle Ages when commoners were prohibited from dressing above their station by statutory laws, to the *sans-culottes*⁵ during the French Revolution whose clothes are still today what identifies them as a social class and as a moment in history (Singer, 2020), where individuals used red, white and blue cockades as an ubiquitous symbol of revolution.

Fashion changed dramatically in the late 19th century. Haute couture revolutionized clothes design and production. Charles Frederick Worth and Paul Poiret made fashion an art form by stressing originality and workmanship (Steele, 2010).

⁴ "A term applied to the appearance of businesswomen in tailored suits with wide padded shoulders, high-heeled shoes, sleek make-up, and back-combed hair" (Cumming et al, 2010)

⁵ Sans-culottes was a term coined by the aristocrats to the members of the working class that participated in the French Revolution in the 18th century. The name "with no underpants" was given as the revolutionaries did not use underpants, a garment reserved for the *bourgeois*, but rather a pair of long cotton pants.

Haute couture distinguished itself from practical attire. It introduced the fashion designer as an artist who created unique, imaginative designs beyond pragmatism. The fashion shows showcased various artistic interpretations with its lavish displays and runway spectacles (Lipovetsky, 2002). Fashion has evolved beyond servicing fundamental requirements to convey an era's spirit and aspirations.

Later, the 20th century democratized fashion. Mass manufacturing and ready-to-wear made fashion more accessible (McDowell, 2009). As fashion became more democratic, it also became more personal and symbolic. Personal likes, identities, and goals were now expressed via clothing.

A relevant moment in history worth mentioning is the *Suffragette's* movement⁶ in the early 20th century, as women fought for voting rights, they used recognizable color codes to invoke political messages: green for hope, white for purity, and purple for loyalty. Kamala Harris paid homage to the historical moment by wearing a white pantsuit by the designer Carolina Herrera, with a “pussybow⁷” blouse during her victory speech in 2020. It was not the first time that women in the Democrat party relied on the political significance of the color white to make statements. At the 2019 State of the Union Address, congresswomen dressed all in white to recognize women’s right to vote. Also, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wore white to her swearing-in as a congresswoman in January 2019.

The 1920’s and 30’s marked an enormous shift in women’s apparel, as they started for the first time wearing trousers. The first woman to do so was Luisa Capetillo, a Puerto Rican woman in 1919, who was then arrested for the crime of wearing pants as a woman. Later, the Hollywood trendsetters such as Amelia Earhart and Katherine Hepburn encouraged the female masses to also wear them. During World War II it became very common for women to wear their husband’s trousers or work suits to fill in the previously male dominated jobs.

The 1960s and 1970s countercultures democratized fashion. Young people abandoned mainstream fashion for unique designs that questioned society (Craik, 2009).

⁶ Term used to denominate the members of the Women's Social and Political Movement, created in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters. The union’s purpose was to fight for women’s right to vote.

⁷ Pussybow or *lavallière*, is a bow tied at the neck (similar to the ones cats have), usually associated with women's blouses. It is meant to be the equivalent of a man’s tie, a symbol of power dressing (Cumming et al, 2010).

Tie-dye, bell-bottoms, and mini-skirts represented revolt and self-identity. Counterculture fashion was a statement of individualism and rejection of conformity.

Fashion was crucial to the civil rights and feminist movements. Natural hairstyles and pantsuits became symbols of freedom and emancipation for African American activists and feminists (Collins, 2000; Davis, 2016). Style became a potent way to convey social and political views. As an example, we may mention the “uniform” worn by the Black Panthers⁸ group during the 1960’s up to the 1980’s to both seize power and resist it, consisting of leather jackets and berets (Singer, 2020). And more recently, we can identify some political movements made through fashion such as the *Times’ Up*⁹ + #MeToo¹⁰ initiative during the 2018 Golden Globes, where women dressed in black with the intention to respond to gender inequality and sexual harassment issues in the film industry, as well as in society as a whole.

It is not only Democrats who use fashion as statements. A critical moment was when Melania Trump decided to wear a jacket embroidered with the phrase “I really don’t care, do u?” to visit a detention center for migrant children. According to her, the phrase was directed at her left-wing critics, however, many thought that it was not appropriate to wear during a First Lady’s official visit. Although, we must not forget that the former First Lady invoked her best Jackie Kennedy’s prim fashion sense at the inauguration back in 2016. Even though Kennedy was the wife of a Democrat president, her outfits became the Republican women’s guide for looking like a traditional and conservative woman (Benson, 2020).

As noted, the power and structure of an organization can be controlled by the formal or informal exercise of fashion. It is noticeable, but unsurprising that more often, women are the core of the discussion when it comes to making political statements through fashion. The political sphere is still very much male dominated, and women face more scrutiny when it comes to their appearance. The way one portrays themselves is a

⁸ The Black Panthers were a revolutionary socialist organization created in the 1960’s in the United States. Their initial main practices involved patrolling the streets of Oakland in order to prevent police brutality against African Americans (Duncan, 2021).

⁹ The Time’s Up Organization provides legal advice to anyone who was a victim of sexual discrimination and/or sexually harassed in their place of work.

¹⁰ #MeToo is a movement that fights against sexual harassment and sexual violence.

fundamental part of one's expression of identity. "Clothes include more than the three-dimensional objects that cover the body" (Mhoon, 2004:4).

iii. The expressive nature of fashion.

The earliest forms of clothing were primarily functional, serving essential purposes such as protection from the elements and practicality. Ancient clothes were made from animal skins and plant fibers to be worn for function, rather than style (Kroeber, 1923). The contemporary understanding of fashion was still in its early stages, far from the elaborate patterns and various aesthetics of later eras. As societies became more complex, so did their clothing and the concept of fashion as a status symbol began to take shape. For instance, in Ancient Egypt, elaborate garments were reserved for the elite, and clothing was a visible indicator of social status (Darnell and Manassa, 2007). Similar attitudes emerged in other ancient cultures, with clothing reflecting hierarchical structures and power dynamics.

The symbolism attached to clothing gradually gained prominence. In medieval Europe, sumptuary laws regulated who could wear certain colors, fabrics, and styles, reinforcing distinctions between social classes (Boucher, 1987). Clothing became a visual language, conveying messages about wealth, occupation, and rank.

With this being said, for a language to exist, one must establish symbols and signs. However, solely these are not enough to provide meaning. In order for them to transform into a language, one needs to insert these symbols and signs in some sort of system. As Ferdinand De Saussure would put it: language is composed by a system of relations and oppositions so, in conclusion, a language is composed by the way in which one chooses to combine symbols and signs. In the 19th century, Wilhelm von Humboldt defined language as the "infinite use of finite things". This means that when learning a language, syntax is key in allowing us to produce an infinite number of sentences. According to the Principle of Compositionality¹¹, when you know a language, you understand how to combine several meanings to compose a final complex expression.

¹¹ This principle explains that the general meaning of a complex expression depends on the meaning of its composing parts and the norms used to combine them. Also known as the Frege's Principle, named after Gottlob Frege, credited for the first modern use of this principle (Szabó, 2020).

So, we may ask ourselves, is this theory translatable to fashion? Can someone's garment indicate or convey a message? For example, is someone wearing an apron trying to portray something? This scenario is quite trivial and has quite honestly nothing to do with language because there is simply no intent of communication. Wearing an apron is hardly a way of expressing a message so, given the expressive nature of fashion, does it mean that only a certain type of clothes are a means of communication? Take the example of uniforms, they indicate someone's role or job within a society. Again, we can refer to the previously mentioned idea of systems in language and translate it to fashion: the idea that one would select an item of clothing because of the meaning it gets according to the way it relates to another item seems quite intuitive in the case of fashion, simply because a person will always choose an item over another in a range of possibilities. The fact that one would wear this and not that is precisely meaningful. Later, when looking at an outfit, the resulting meaning of the outfit will depend on the selection of the several items that compose the outfit and how they were combined and arranged.

However, we notice that, unlike language, the interpretation of meanings in the case of clothing is much more open. At its core, fashion allows people to replicate some codes and at the same time to distinguish themselves by following new and unconventional trends. We understand now that the idea of distinction goes against a transparent form of communication, and it leads us to the conclusion that the pragmatics of clothes seem to be quite different from the pragmatics of general communication and the reason is simple: people strive for distinction and non-transparency when it comes to the construction of meanings in their personal fashion.

Grant McCracken investigates to what extent clothes can be considered a linguistic code and through an experiment he came to the hypothesis that the more clothes simulate the combinatorial freedom of language the less its message would be clear, thus, for him, excluding the possibility that clothing can constitute a language, at the most a "code" (McCracken, 1988). Fred Davis later arrived at a conclusion: it is possible to define three particularities of the "fashion code" (Davis, 1992). Firstly, it depends strongly on context. The meaning of a garment depends intimately on when, and where it is worn. Secondly, there is an infinite amount of possible interpretations, thus the meaning of an item depends on the receiver of the message. And lastly, the so-called "fashion code" implies a necessary "under coding", in this case, an "aesthetic code" which relies on, for example, the meaning

of the fabric, the color, or even the cut. These three definers of the “fashion code” allow it to be possible to convey a global message even if the portrayer of the message deviates from the dominant meanings. Like McCracken, Davis prefers to look at clothing as a code rather than a language (Davis, 1992).

Thus, the goal of this chapter is to investigate whether what one is wearing may indicate or stand for something. Are the characteristics of the garment only relevant if they manifest a trait from the wearer? For this, I will explore the notion of identity and how it relates to this form of expression: fashion. This previous statement is another way to say that clothes are basically signs. Clothes have the ability to showcase our mood, our religious or political beliefs, our social status. As fashion is often placed in the category of creative industries, it would make sense to state that the reason why fashion is nowadays an established art form is because the industry has succeeded in articulating strong and impactful statements about global issues. After all, arts are the vessel to deliver some “truths” to the world by means of aesthetics and entertainment, making it possible for individuals to relate (or not) to certain topics disclosed through clothing. In our understanding, fashion has a deep relationship with personal and social identity, it is one of the most explicit expressions of it. Therefore, we argue that the identity phenomenon is embodied by one’s personal garments, making it a form of expression.

In summary, the progression of fashion as a means of communication exemplifies the intricate interaction between personal identities and societal changes. Fashion has evolved from a functional medium to a powerful tool for self- and community expression in response to changing cultural, social, and technological conditions. The phenomenon of using clothes as a means of communication, establishing social connections, and expressing individuality stands as a testament of a constant and fundamental human tendency.

The ongoing evolution of fashion prompts us to contemplate the increasingly vast array of opportunities for self-expression and the influence of clothes in shaping our self-image and social structure. Fashion is not confined to being a business or a trend. In fact, it is a dynamic and expressive form of communication that one creates via their wardrobe choices.

iv. Fashion as a tool for social change.

Fashion has often been at the forefront of social change movements. Understanding the dynamic relationship between fashion and social change requires a theoretical framework that can shed light on the ever-evolving relationship between clothing, culture, and society. Several theoretical perspectives provide valuable insights into this complex junction. This part of the literature review examines historical and contemporary examples of fashion being used as a tool for social change. It explores how garments and accessories have conveyed powerful messages about civil rights, gender equality, and other social issues.

One opinion is that “symbolic interactionism” highlights symbols and meanings in the social realm (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism argues that people constantly analyze and confer meaning to their surroundings. This idea proposes that clothing and style are strong representations of personal and community identities, beliefs, and values (Kawamura, 2005). People express themselves and their goals by means of fashion.

A related theoretical lens is semiotics, which studies signs and symbols (Barthes, 1967). Fashion and clothes carry messages and cultural meanings, according to semiotics. From logos to colors and textiles, fashion goods have culturally acknowledged semiotic meanings (Barnard, 1996).

Moreover, Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital offers insights into the role of fashion in social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu, individuals accumulate cultural capital through their tastes, preferences, and knowledge of cultural fields. Thus, fashion choices reflect cultural capital and social status. According to Woodward (2007), fashion reinforces social hierarchies by dividing people. Wearing expensive labels or avant-garde designs might indicate cultural capital and social position.

Additionally, the concept of subcultural style, as explored by Dick Hebdige (1979), helps explain how fashion may be a vehicle for resistance and revolt. Punks and goths typically defy traditional conventions with their clothes (Brake, 1985). In this context, fashion serves as a tool for subcultures to express their opposition to mainstream values and assert their unique identities.

Furthermore, fashion theorists like Joanne Entwistle (2015) have also examined the concept of performativity within the universe of fashion. Entwistle follows Judith Butler's

Gender Performativity Theory ¹²(Butler, 1988) to claim that clothing reflects identity. Thus, fashion is an active performance that shapes and reinforces one's identity.

These theoretical frameworks collectively evidenciate the multifaceted nature of fashion as a cultural, symbolic, and social phenomenon. They highlight the idea that fashion is not a superficial or trivial universe but a powerful force that influences how individuals perceive themselves and interact within society.

v. The role of fashion in political campaigns.

More political campaigns recognize fashion's influence on public opinion. This section examines how politicians, and their staff, use apparel to reach voters.

Politicians' images and public impressions are undeniably shaped by fashion. Political candidates dress to convey messages (Entwistle, 2015). Americans often associate red ties with Republicans and blue with Democrats (Kreisman and Lach, 2008).

Candidates recruit supporters and raise funds via merchandising, traditionally through clothing, hats, and accessories (Nielsen and Rojas, 2018). Candidates use apparel, caps, and accessories to mobilize followers and generate donations (Nielsen and Rojas, 2018). Thus, politicians' images and voters' views are heavily influenced by fashion. Politicians choose their clothing and campaign products to communicate with their audience.

vi. Fashion and Globalization.

Fashion is a major component of globalization¹³, it affects civilizations on a worldwide scale (McCracken, 1988). Political fashion statements have spread globally due to this phenomenon (Finkelstein, 2013).

Globalization has made fashion cross boundaries and cultures. Global interchange of ideas, styles, and aesthetics have merged from different influences (Miller, 2005). This interplay has expanded fashion's language, allowing for many inspirations and further

¹² The Gender Performativity Theory defends that the gender roles are one's performance of traditional roles expected by our society.

¹³ The term "globalization" describes the interconnection between different cultures and economies around the globe.

developments. The proof is revealed as the 2020 US Presidential Election showed how political fashion spreads worldwide. Campaign products, slogans, and memorable fashion choices were discussed and emulated worldwide (Nan, Li, and Zeng, 2021).

Chapter 3: Fashion and the 2020 Presidential Election

- i. Fashion's influence on political discourse.

The 2020 American Presidential Election was a turning point in politics, marked by significant political decisions as well as fashion's major impact on political discourse. Political leaders and celebrities' apparel choices throughout this election season shaped popular opinions about candidates and distinct topics.

The influence of “power dressing¹⁴” during this election period cannot be understated. Political candidates have long recognized the importance of their public image, with clothing serving as a potent conveyor of their image and subsequent political message (Entwistle, 2015). What one wears can portray authority, relatability, and a connection to the values of their supporters (Barnard, 2014). Throughout history, we have seen numerous examples of political figures using their attire to communicate messages to the public. We can depict Jacqueline Kennedy's First Lady iconic choices of wardrobe. Her carefully curated outfits were chosen to convey elegance, refinement, and American style (Weisberger, 2011). More recently, Michelle Obama's high-end and affordable wardrobe as First Lady symbolized her relatability to the American public (Simonton, 2017).

In the 2020 Presidential Election, the then President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden had unique styles that reflected their personalities and political views. On one hand, Trump was noted for his fitted suits and red "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) baseball cap. The MAGA cap, with the motto in white lettering on a red backdrop, became his campaign symbol (Binkley, 2020). Conservative followers were prone to like it because it promised national restoration and glory (Duen, 2020). On the other hand, Joe Biden's wardrobe selections evoked a statesmanlike appearance. Navy or charcoal suits were his usual attire. He contrasted his predecessor's chaotic style by conveying stability, experience, and a return to normalcy through his wardrobe (Friedman, 2020).

As a matter of fact, the clothing worn by political candidates is subject to careful scrutiny and planning. A candidate's outfit is supposed to convey professionalism,

¹⁴ Power dressing refers to a style of dressing that conveys the efficiency and competence of the person wearing a certain type of outfit. This concept includes garments such as suits, blazers or padded shoulders.

relatability, genuineness, and empathy (Cohen, 2003). Formal work clothes, informal wear, and culturally relevant apparel might affect a candidate's image and voter connection. It is customary for candidates to hire fashion advisers and stylists to better match their clothes to their campaign's messaging. For instance, Hillary Clinton's regular pantsuit outfits were intended to convey power and competence (Sali, 2016).

Beyond the attire of the candidates themselves, clothing became a canvas for political symbolism during the 2020 election. Both parties' supporters expressed their loyalty and political opinions by means of clothes. Campaign t-shirts, caps, and masks transformed into patriotic and even provocative symbols. One famous example was the "Nasty Woman" t-shirt, which symbolized resistance to Trump's comments after he used this phrase to criticize Hillary Clinton in a 2016 debate. Clinton then adopted it as a badge of honor, referencing it often in her campaign (Haglage, 2017). Left-wing supporters wore the word on items of clothing to show female empowerment and reject discriminatory remarks.

We may now conclude that fashion has an influence on voters' views of politicians and topics during the 2020 election. Clothes can definitely affect voters' opinions of politicians' trustworthiness, competency, and relatability (Hahn and Hwang, 1999). Political personalities' attire and campaign merchandise provides subliminal messages that voters use to form opinions and consequently mold the election's narrative.

ii. Color psychology and symbolism.

Color plays a significant role in political campaigns, as it can evoke emotions, convey messages, and influence perceptions (Frank and Gilovich, 2008). Political parties are associated with specific colors that represent their ideology and brand. Political symbolism in the United States has long associated red with Republicans and blue with Democrats (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006). Republican politicians adopted the color red to express authority and resolution. While the Democratic party chose the color blue to represent trust, stability, and development, keeping a focus on social concerns and progress.

As aforementioned, President Trump's frequent use of red ties has been purposeful. Studies link red to power and domination (Elliot and Maier, 2014). He may have worn red ties to convey power and authority. In the case of Joe Biden's blue and charcoal suits, he most likely intends to convey a more traditional and comforting appearance. These colors

connote professionalism and dependability (Zyla, 2010). Such clothes may have made Biden appear steady and experienced.

By using the same color scheme in banners, signs, and promotional products, color psychology is used strategically to generate emotions and promote party or candidate identities.

In fact, campaign merchandise plays a dual role in political campaigns: it serves as a fundraising tool and a means of connecting with supporters. Campaign logos, slogans, and candidate names are printed on rally t-shirts, caps, buttons, and bumper stickers (Nielsen and Rojas, 2018). These objects are not merely a collection of frivolous items but a deliberate extension of a candidate's brand identity. Campaign logos are carefully crafted to convey vital messages and appeal to target groups, with the intent of building communities among supporters. Voters demonstrate their political views and support a candidate by wearing and exhibiting campaign gear or, as we now understand them, symbols (Hillygus and Shields, 2014).

Additionally, during the 2020 election, "VOTE" campaign apparel appeared everywhere. Celebrities and influencers wore clothes and accessories with this simple but powerful statement (Adiv, 2020). This served as a call to action, encouraging voter participation and civic engagement.

In conclusion, the masterminds behind political campaigns are using fashion quite effectively. From color psychology and symbolism to campaign products and candidate apparel, fashion is carefully examined and strategically used to reach voters and communicate important messages.

iii. Fashion brands taking a political stand.

Many fashion labels are adopting political stands and supporting social and political concerns in the current political climate. In fact, brand activism, often referred to as "corporate social activism," engages fashion businesses to intentionally address political and social concerns in their marketing and communication (Micheletti, 2003). More and more brands are participating in activism to connect with socially conscious consumers. These actions are increasingly motivated by Millennials' and Gen Z's value of socially

responsible brands. This means that brands can gain loyal customers by supporting political issues (Sprinkle and Maines, 2010).

Another motivator for this change is the inner brand culture itself. Socially and environmentally responsible companies may feel obligated to utilize their power for good (Elkington, 1998). The founders' ideals or the company's growing culture might inspire this dedication (Crane and Matten, 2010).

Fashion businesses are now using many methods to spread their political beliefs. Limited-edition collections or objects that support a cause are a typical strategy, as well as promoting social and political concerns through marketing and advertising. They communicate using visuals, narrative, and digital platforms. These days, brands can reach socially conscious customers and even start political debates on social media (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010).

Another frequently used strategy includes activating collaborations with influencers or activists and partnering with cause-driven individuals. These partnerships validate the brand's advocacy. For instance, Patagonia collaborated with environmentalists to advocate for the climate crisis.

Even though brand activism can be a powerful tool for advocating social and political causes, it is not without its challenges and risks. One of the primary risks is the potential for backlash from consumers who disagree with the brand's stance (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). If brands appear fake or opportunistic in their advocacy, they may risk boycotts, negative press, and reputation harm (Lantos, 2001). Brand activism involves navigating difficult political and social challenges. Brands must find their own balance while walking a fine line between activism and avoidance. Mistakes can lead to "woke-washing¹⁵," when companies benefit from social problems (Holt, 2020).

Therefore, the ideal scenario is when brands are honest and link their advocacy with their principles and deeds. Inconsistent messaging or broken promises can and will probably damage customer confidence (Crane and Matten, 2010).

To illustrate this, we will examine two examples of activism by fashion brands: Patagonia and Nike. In both cases, the brands have taken explicit political stances.

Firstly, the outdoor apparel manufacturer Patagonia is a fashion industry leader in brand advocacy. The company's slogan is "in business to save our home planet".

¹⁵ "Woke-washing" is the use of ethical and progressive principles in advertising to boost a company's reputation without proving genuine commitment to them.

Patagonia's "1% for the Planet" program provides 1% of sales to grassroots environmental groups (1% for the Planet 2021). In 2017, the brand's lawsuit against the Trump administration over Utah's protected area deforestation garnered news. A prominent statement read "The President Stole Your Land" on Patagonia's website (2017). This action fit Patagonia's beliefs and was popular with eco-conscious clients. More recently, the founder, Yvon Chouinard, transferred the ownership of the company to two nonprofit organizations in order to ensure that all profits are directly invested in combating the climate crisis (Kohli, 2022).

As a second example, we can depict the popular sportswear brand Nike. The brand joined the political discussion in 2018 with its "Dream Crazy" commercial starring NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick. Kaepernick was famous for kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality and racial injustice. The impactful commercial said "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything". Many supported and others criticized the effort. Some consumers applauded Nike for addressing a difficult subject, while others boycotted and burnt Nike items (Battaglio, 2018). Even though the ad was controversial, Nike's stock price reached record highs, showing customers liked it (Reilly, 2018).

iv. Polarization and fashion - a closer look.

Political polarization in the United States was a prominent theme during the 2020 election. All sectors of American culture seemed to be divided during the 2020 presidential election. This split affected fashion as a cultural and visual medium. We can unravel several features of this divisiveness while underlining the importance of fashion's interplay with politics during this important era in American history.

To begin, we can identify the striking division through the colors of each party. Red and blue are well-established labels for the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively. However, these colors became political identifiers during the 2020 election, transcending party connections. This fashion polarization strengthened the idea that the US was ideologically split.

Secondly, Fashion has a unique capacity to convey messages succinctly and powerfully. The 2020 election saw political slogans become fashion trends. Clothing, accessories, and masks featured "Make America Great Again" and "Build Back Better" slogans. These phrases represented political movements' ideals and goals, not just campaign goods (McMillan Cottom, 2020). In addition, these political slogans were worn outside of campaign gatherings. People used dress to represent their politics in daily life. This strategy blended fashion and political action by using apparel for self-expression and public participation (Entwistle, 2015).

Next, polarization sparked a counter-fashion movement, especially among political opponents. Protest fashion, clothing and accessories that criticized politicians and slogans grew (Kovács, 2022). Visual protests included satirical clothing and campaign logo parodies. For example, the "Nevertheless, She Persisted" apparel line championed female empowerment and opposed patriarchal politics. These counter-fashion representations expressed opposition and showed fashion's potential for social and political criticism (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992).

Lastly, we can conclude that fashion's association with political divisions during the 2020 election showed how profoundly political beliefs had permeated personal identities (Brewer, 1991). Fashion cemented its position as a political symbol rather than simply attire.

Nevertheless, this polarization might worsen social differences. The visual and symbolic aspect of fashion allowed opposing political factions to readily recognize and label each other. Tribalism¹⁶ may create further social fragmentation and hinder meaningful communication (Mason, 2018).

v. Globalization and the spread of political fashion.

The 2020 US presidential election enthralled Americans and gained worldwide interest. This election differed from others because American political fashion trends influenced fashion and political debate abroad. These worldwide trends showed how fashion and politics are intertwined in the internet era.

¹⁶ Tribalism is the strong feeling of loyalty to a community, social group or "tribe".

Globally, the MAGA hat was adopted, for example in Brazil, Australia, and South Korea, many wore red caps to support Trump's populist views (Nan, Li, and Zeng, 2021). Also, the "I Voted" sticker, a symbol of American political engagement, transcended boundaries virtually. Social media users worldwide posted photos of themselves wearing the sticker to support American voters. This digital phenomenon showed the world's interest in American politics and fashion's role in expression (Nan, Li, and Zeng, 2021).

Furthermore, the global effect of American political fashion trends generated issues about fashion's significance in international affairs. Internationals visiting American politicians and diplomats' clothing choices were important. Soft power¹⁷ was used in 2020 Presidential Election fashion diplomacy to promote cultural appreciation and diplomatic messaging (Entwistle, 2015). Diplomats meticulously picked traditional clothes and accessories to show respect for host nations' customs.

However, this internationalization of American political fashion became controversial. The adoption of American political emblems split several regions of the globe. Some saw the MAGA hat as a sign of populism and change, while others saw it as divisive politics (Nan, Li, and Zeng, 2021). This disagreement showed the delicate interplay between American political fashion and worldwide views.

In conclusion, American political fashion trends during the 2020 Presidential Election showed fashion's global reach as a medium of expression and communication. Fashion influenced political discourse globally, from campaign products to classic slogans. And social media amplified these trends, making fashion part of global politics and diplomacy.

vi. Key political gestures through the means of fashion.

In order to better comprehend the interplay between fashion and politics, we will illustrate this intersection with key moments and statements from the 2020 Presidential Campaign. These examples show how fashion has influenced political discourse in several manners.

¹⁷ "Soft power" is a diplomatic approach to international relations. It involves influencing the actions and thoughts of others through attraction rather than confrontation.

Firstly, the now Vice-President, Kamala Harris, often wore Converse Chuck Taylor sneakers during campaign events. Younger and more progressive voters liked Harris' choice of footwear. This seemingly simple fashion choice indicated accessibility, relatability, and a “breather” from political clothes (Malone, 2020).

Another relevant example is the “I Voted” merchandise items. In 2020, stickers and its versions became fashionable campaign paraphernalia. Celebrities and influencers enthusiastically wore these stickers to promote voting turnout and civic engagement (Cortés, 2020).

A third example of a political statement through the means of fashion would be the moment when the former First Lady Melania Trump wore a “pussy-bow” blouse during a presidential debate. The item caused controversy because its symbolism didn't align with Melania's husband, and then President, views (Hawkins, 2020).

vii. Case study: Fashion Our Future.

Even though the previous examples accurately illustrate how fashion statements may transcend aesthetics and influence politics and demonstrate the subtle ways clothes and accessories can communicate, engage people, and affect political perceptions, we can put forward one last case study in order to further underline this relationship: The Fashion Our Future Campaign.

The two co-founders of Studio 189 (a sustainable fashion brand based in Ghana), Abrima Erwiah and the actress Rosario Dawson founded Fashion Our Future, an online platform that encourages voter's registration.

It all started with the question: “What are you going to wear to the polls on November 3rd?”. Fashion Our Future 2020 is a voter registration initiative aimed at leveraging the power of fashion to engage marginalized communities with the political process. This campaign not only strove to encourage voter registration for the United States Presidential Election in 2020 but also provided resources to educate voters about their voting rights, voting eligibility, election dates and many more topics (Sanchez, 2020). The goal for Fashion Our Future was to empower at least one million first-time voters

(Commetric, 2020) and newly registered ones (Yotka, 2020) to make their voices heard in the upcoming election.

Abrima Erwiah, the developer of this initiative, is the co-founder of Studio 189, a fashion life-style brand and social enterprise that produces African-inspired content and clothing. In the beginning of the pandemic, the designer was carrying multiple conversations with fellow designers to understand the global panorama and how they would tackle the challenges that were ahead. At the same time, she was having other conversations about diversity that ended up immersing her in a meditating process about the disconnection between both issues on an industry wide level. That was the decisive moment for her to develop an initiative that would bring together the fashion industry while giving people the opportunity to amplify their voices and providing them with tools to be able to speak about relevant issues.

The fashion history has proven that the way we dress and groom ourselves is so correlated to society, culture, and politics that what you wear to the elections is a crucial statement of your political intent. “Fashion is key to self-expression and inspiring change, whether that is shown on a tote, on your mask or on a T-shirt” (Lehmann, 2020).

What Abrima Erwiah did was empower other designers to create items that would encourage voting. Wearing a T-shirt promoting voting was not the end point of the conversation, but to become a reminder of how crucial the right to vote is. Besides creating conscious style and unique products endowed with incredible creativity, Fashion our Future became about celebrating the use of people’s voice about being proud to express themselves and shape a future of equality and inclusivity (Sanchez, 2020). Brands and designers that were taking part on this journey were committed to sharing information about the election and voting rights, and for this purpose, they re-shaped their own ecommerce platforms - such as websites and mobile apps – to encourage shoppers to not just click “Buy” but also “Register to Vote”.

Coincidentally, the National Voter Registration Day landed very close to the New York Fashion Week. The brands and designers that were leading the initiative decided it would be an excellent opportunity to display it as it was “the most critical election of our lifetime” (Dawson, 2020). In collaboration with Visa, Fashion our Future debuted then an exclusive, limited-edition capsule collection featuring designs by Off-White, Tanya Taylor, Studio 189, and Fe Noel.

Besides, during New York Fashion Week, countless conversations were conducted on social media about the topic. For example, Patagonia, an American Clothing company, completely dominated the conversation about the Presidential Elections after developing shorts with a hidden message in the interior label saying :“Vote the assholes out”. A very direct message, which by “assholes” then meant “politicians from any party who deny or disregard the climate crisis and ignore science” (Patagonia, 2020). The shorts quickly sold out, so we can deduce it had the expected impact.

To conclude, the campaign not only brought designers and brands together in the creation of unique and empowering products, displayed information about the voting process and voting rights, made an intelligent use of the biggest fashion platform of the world to display the message, and created a call to action by enabling voting registration through brands’ platforms and events. This was the first time in history that the United States’ Presidential Election experienced such kind of political activism coming from fashion brands and designers, at a time in history when fashion was being completely redefined as a consequence of a world pandemic.

Chapter 4: Fashion, Identity, and Power

i. Fashion as a form of identity expression.

Fashion is unequivocally a vehicle for individual and collective identity expression. We will discuss how fashion shapes personal and collective identities and how clothes and style choices may represent one's personality, ideas, and connections.

As evidenced by our investigation, one's clothing reflects their culture, morals, and goals (Entwistle, 2015). What we wear may represent who we are and what we stand for, making fashion an important form of identity expression (Kaiser, 2012).

The semiotics of clothing, including colors, patterns, and styles, contribute to the visual language of identity (Barthes, 1983). For instance, traditional clothes worn at cultural or religious rituals might show a deep connection to one's background and beliefs (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992). Conversely, subcultures and countercultures use unique garments to proclaim alternative identities and question social norms (Hebdige, 1979).

As fashion continues to evolve, the relationship between clothing and identity remains dynamic, reflecting the complex interplay of personal expression, cultural belonging, and societal change.

ii. The semiotics of clothing.

We intend to examine how the semiotics of clothes transmit meaning and ideas. In order to do so, we will address clothing symbolism, cultural relevance and fashion's visual communication ability.

Semiotics is the study of signals and symbols and their interpretation. It helps explain in which way fashion and politics communicate through the means of garments (Barthes, 1967). We wish to examine how clothing and accessories transmit meaning and messages beyond their practical purpose.

One of the fundamental aspects of semiotics in fashion is the idea that clothing serves as a symbolic representation. Clothing and accessories have cultural, societal, and personal

connotations (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992). For example, military uniforms represent authority, discipline, and patriotism (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1995), while a clergyman's gown symbolizes their function in a religious community (Barnard, 2014).

Another particularly important facet of clothing semiotics is the usage of colors. The vast array of colors can express different emotions and alternate messages. For instance, the color red denotes passion, danger, and revolution, whereas white represents purity and impartiality (Gottschall and Wilson, 2005). Politicians strategically employ color choices to appeal to their audience.

Furthermore, logos and branding are essential to clothing semiotics. Clothing with logos, emblems, or phrases communicate visually (Kapferer, 2008). For example, the 2008 Obama campaign's "Hope" poster by Shepard Fairey combined typography and images to promote hope and change (Fairey, 2008). Campaign apparel typically includes phrases and symbols that represent the candidate's program (Entman, 2012).

In addition, clothing semiotics include contrasts and subversion. Dressing unconventionally may be a significant political statement (Barnard, 1996). Politically active women wearing pantsuits defy gender stereotypes (Berger, 2004). However, political leaders who follow conservative dress rules to indicate stability and tradition can also carry political weight (Entwistle, 2015).

Lastly, it is crucial to understand that clothing semiotics may differ between cultures (Bourdieu, 1984). A garment or color may have distinct meanings in different cultures. In a globalized society where fashion statements traverse borders, cross-cultural interpretations are crucial (Kawamura, 2005). Fashion diplomacy requires cultural awareness since a symbol of patriotism in one country may be misinterpreted elsewhere (Daly and Demery, 1996).

Finally, fashion and political clothing semiotics is a rich and vibrant topic of research. Clothing and accessories convey messages, beliefs, and connections. Understanding the complex language of clothing semiotics helps us understand design decisions and realize the political and social significance of clothes.

- iii. Fashion as a vehicle for empowerment.

There is no doubt that fashion has the potential to empower individuals and communities. Fashion empowers people and groups to question norms, proclaim their identities, and push for change. Fashion's role as a vehicle for empowerment is far-reaching. It empowers underprivileged and underrepresented communities. Singular people and groups may now challenge norms, accept diversity, and fight for social change. Fashion empowers disadvantaged and underrepresented groups by reclaiming their identities and voices, from LGBTQ+ rights to gender affirmation, women's suffrage to disability inclusion.

iv. Fashion as a means of political mobilization.

“Clothing has political significance because it affects the relationships between citizens. Clothing is not simply a private or personal matter; it implies the existence of an intersubjective social world in which one presents oneself and is seen by others. In examining the implications of fashion for political relationships. (...) Clothes, therefore, sometimes facilitate the democratic ideal of widely distributed power. Fashion can provoke dialogue about social and political matters, and that dialogue is democratic. When fashion manifests creativity, respect, allegiance, or membership, the relationships that it fosters are potentially democratic” (Miller, 2005).

Fashion can serve as a means of political mobilization, bringing people together around common causes. From protest dressing to awareness initiatives, fashion has mobilized people for political involvement. It promotes a sense of community, raises awareness, and amplifies voices. One can witness evident political mobilization through the means of fashion, often during rallies and demonstrations. Activists choose distinctive clothes or accessories to visually identify themselves as part of a collective movement (Entwistle, 2015). For example, in 2017, the "pussyhat" worn at the Women's March by participants symbolized feminist resistance (Givhan, 2017).

Fashion activism includes awareness and funding initiatives. Wearable products like t-shirts and pins spread political messages and earn money for organizations (Reilly, 2018). The sale of these items not only provides financial assistance to the cause in question but also initiates conversations about the subjects that they represent.

Fashion inspires and empowers, which helps political mobilization. Politically charged apparel can inspire agency and commitment (Chabria, 2013). People who wear values-based clothing are more likely to join a larger movement, magnifying its effect.

In essence, fashion's ability to mobilize people for political issues proves that it is more than just clothing, it is a statement of activism and a tool for collective action.

Chapter 5: Fashion and Social Change

i. Understanding fashion and social change.

In order to focus on the socially changing role of fashion, one must observe the importance of *avant-garde*¹⁸ aesthetics. Designers such as Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, Martin Margiela, Hussein Chalayan and Helmut Lang and the “Antwerp Six” challenged the norms in the late 20th century.

For instance, the Japanese designers Yamamoto and Kawakubo, born in a post-war Japanese austerity, both question the western conventions. To be precise, they focus on two of the pillars of western fashion: the notion of perfection; and the relationship between clothing and gender. On one hand, Yamamoto dives into an aesthetic that reports the passage of time on his clothes. He decides to use different techniques, from crumpling, washing and raw cutting, to illustrate his quest for imperfection. On the other hand, Kawakubo looks for innovation in the accidental, disrupting the sewing machines to cause irregularities in her garments. She thus diverts the clothes from its primary function. The female designer later created *Comme des Garçons*, a brand that aims at rethinking women’s clothes garments, distancing it from the more traditional clothing conventions that is supposedly intended to enhance female forms. Kawakubo develops a desire to free women, in her silhouettes she over covers the hips, waist and buttocks, thus canceling the female body.

Here we catch a glimpse of what “protest dressing” is all about. It is a form of “fashion activism¹⁹”.

“The tradition of “protest dressing” isn’t new, but it has been revived dramatically of late, with incarnations including the appearance of women dressed as Margaret Atwood-inspired Handmaids in Washington to protest

¹⁸ The term means literally, “the guard in front”, thus it is understood as the new experimental ideas and methods in the fields of art, literature or music.

¹⁹ Fashion activism is the practice of using fashion as a tool for social change. The term was coined by Celine Seeman. Fashion activism aims at implementing changes beyond the locally offered channels of influence. It can be used as a form of protest or support according to one’s beliefs and motivations in order to influence the political agenda or implement changes in the fashion industry (Tena, 2021).

Brett Kavanaugh's appointment²⁰, the "Pussy hats" adopted by thousands of women on marches after Trump's election, and the wearing of black on the red carpet at the 2018 Golden Globes for the Time's Up campaign. It seems that everything from gender inequality to racism to workplace bullying is now being protested via fashion." (Roche, 2019).

The concept was developed to challenge the norms. The creation of signature looks associated with a political movement aimed at creating discussion around a particular subject.

This concept should not be confused with "power dressing". The latter is used to suggest authority, power, wealth, and status. From early on, women tended to mimic the signature styles of men to emulate the same authority. From the armor of Joan of Arc to the almost caricatured shoulder pads used in the 1980's, to Hillary Clinton's pioneering use of pantsuits among women in politics. Power dressing is an act of empowerment.

Moreover, Martin Margiela criticizes the notion of "new in fashion²¹" and rethinks the concept of time. To him fashion is cyclical and there is no point in avoiding it, therefore, he reuses and repurposes many materials from old collections to create new ones, as well as reconstructing classical historical looks from a modern perspective. The Belgian designer also repudiates the "spectacular" character of fashion. He remains as private as possible and hides models' faces often in his shows, using masks, paint, or even fringes.

Somehow, we can relate this notion to the usage of masks during the pandemic. Because a "mask" is already defined as an object to conceal or rather to be used as a costume. In fact, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a mask is "a cover or partial cover for the face used for disguise" or "a protective covering for the face or part of the face" ("mask", 2021). At the beginning of the pandemic, the purpose of masks started to be solely about public safety, but quickly people realized that they could take the new mandatory accessory and make it their own. The accessory eventually evolved to a sort of "costume", representing different ideologies and particular messages. The Dictionary of Fashion History defines "costume" as "a term used to indicate the appearance, i.e. clothing, hairstyle and other decorations, which distinguished a particular class, nation or historic

²⁰ Kavanaugh, a member of the Republican party, was appointed by the then President Donald Trump to be Associate Justice to the Supreme Court of the United States in 2018. In the interim, two women accused him of separate occasions of sexual assault in the past.

²¹ "New in fashion", or "in vogue", means the current style.

period. Thus “costume collections” and “costume history”. Also used to denote the theatrical clothing worn by performers in order to represent a character in a ballet, opera or play, and in the 20th century on film or TV.” (“costume”, 2021). In fact, fashion has a strong performative component. As Margiela tried to distance himself from it, others embraced this facet of fashion during the year 2020. One can argue that the act of putting on a “mask” or a “costume” incentivizes an individual to transform into a character and perform. A great example would be Nancy Pelosi’s matching masks and pantsuits. The Democrat turned the accessory into a fashion statement, it complemented her “armor” as a female politician. As simple as it may sound, the additional accessory may confer extra confidence and ultimately allow one to “perform” better. Again, this was the purpose when Hollywood stars started to display on social media their new inscribed masks with the word “vote”. Not only it became a stylish item to wear, but it also allowed people to express their thoughts and gave them a sense of unity and power.

However, one may argue the opposite. Masks can be used to conceal, in this case, to hide behind an empty slogan and to falsely provide a sense of community. It can help an individual to better pretend to be a part of the movement. Either way, the item became the perfect canvas to portray a message, and intended or not, it was being shared: Vote!

ii. The role of social media in amplifying fashion's message.

Evidently, social media platforms have emerged as powerful amplifiers of fashion's messages, enabling fashion activists, brands, and individuals to reach global audiences instantaneously (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016). Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become dynamic spaces where political statements are disseminated, discussed and embraced. Social media's democratization encourages people to challenge norms and push for change. For example, users may advocate for ethical and sustainable fashion through user-generated content, viral challenges, and online petitions (Freeman, 2006). Global consumers and activist groups urge business entities to meet digital community values and expectations (Wheeler, 2019).

Considering that the current ideal of self-expression, powered by social media, leads to a universal willingness to participate in the political sphere, we will take into account the

implications of specific political statements expressed by the fashion industry in general, as well as specific brands and designers, and how they relate to the consumer's needs and desires.

The digital era has further accelerated the evolution of fashion as a medium of expression. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest have democratized fashion, allowing individuals to curate and share their personal style with global audiences (Kawamura, 2005). Influencers and fashion bloggers have emerged as influential figures, shaping trends and challenging traditional notions of beauty (Rocamora, 2011).

Digital fashion has also blurred the boundaries between the physical and virtual worlds. Virtual clothing and digital fashion shows have become innovative ways for designers to express their creativity. This digital frontier offers new avenues for self-expression and challenges traditional concepts of ownership and consumption.

We shall contextualize this phenomenon within the time frame of the year 2020. The most anticipated presidential elections of all times were about to take place. By this year, social media in the U.S. had about 233 million users. To be more specific, 72% of American citizens in their voting age were actively using some form of social media (Suciu, 2020). Data suggested that the most popular social networks were YouTube, with 73% of adult users in the U.S., Facebook, with 69% users in the U.S., and Instagram (37%) (Pew Research Center, 2019). Only 22% of adults in the U.S. were using Twitter, 24% were using Snapchat (24%) and 20% WhatsApp. Alongside this data, we recognize that the pandemic has pushed most of our physical interactions away, favoring online communication.

Social media was at the time considered an important platform to deliver engagement during the election cycle, compared to earlier elections, and was given an additional degree of responsibility in reaching youth with information. "For people who are on social media, it is virtually impossible to avoid reminders and encouragement to vote," remarked Dr. Jen Golbeck. The idea was that social media - unlike other traditional mass media outlets such as newspapers or radio - had the ability to facilitate/manipulate the provision and consumption of one-sided information, either through the use of algorithms or by allowing individuals to navigate into preferred content. Experts also believe that social media has positively impacted the citizens' civic engagement, registration to vote,

and early voting (Moore and Hinckle, 2020) such that many states in 2020 reported record breaking new voter registration numbers and “early voting” also broke an historic record.

Although the boost in social media’s engagement appears to have played a key role in increasing civic engagement, as in every aspect of our lives, there are also some disadvantages such as misinformation and disinformation. An important part of the recent public discussion about the role of social media platforms in impacting aspects of our daily life has been shaped by controversies, including the consulting firm Cambridge Analytica’s involvement in some of the political campaigns. Back in 2026, leading up to Election Day, there also was a huge rise in cases of video manipulation where video clips were created and edited by professionals with malicious purposes. Using artificial intelligence techniques, these videos were created to assemble images and videos from candidates, computer generated, showing missteps that candidates perhaps didn’t commit making them appear less competent.

Still, an alternative perspective suggests that social media platforms were biased against conservatives and that its younger left-leaning users are unlikely to favor elections toward right-wing politicians. "Social media has certainly facilitated this but it is undeniable that, across the world, people are more politically polarized, rallying around people who share their opinions and are more likely to share their views publicly." (Whitfield, 2019).

iii. Celebrity endorsements, activism, and advocacy.

Celebrities have long played a role in American politics, using their platforms to endorse candidates and influence public opinion (Hollihan, 2016). Celebrities sponsored candidates and shared political messages through their wardrobe choices during the 2020 presidential election. For instance, Lady Gaga's spectacular presence at a Biden campaign event, wearing a high-necked white shirt with a large gold dove brooch conveyed a message of peace and unity (Ember, 2020). The iconic dove brooch signified unity and an end to political division. Whereas Lil Wayne wore a red "Make America Great Again" cap to a meeting with President Trump to show his support (Mazza, 2020). This

photo-documented endorsement changed public perception and raised questions about the role of celebrities in politics.

We can now understand how fashion advocates are crucial to social and political agendas. Fashion activism and advocacy combine fashion with social change. In an age of social consciousness and corporate responsibility, fashion industry professionals have used their platforms to promote social and political concerns. Fashion activism addresses environmental sustainability, gender equality, racial justice, and more (Duffy, 2016).

iv. Challenges and critiques of fashion's role in cultural change.

While fashion has the potential to drive social change, it is not without challenges and criticisms.

One major challenge has to do with "activism washing" or "slacktivism." This expression refers to companies or individuals adopting socially conscious positions or appropriating symbols for profit or personal advantage, without actually taking significant action (Binkley, 2017). Many critics accuse fashion companies that embrace socially relevant statements or work with social justice initiatives without changing their business operations of superficial activism (Roberts, 2020). In fact, this calls into question whether fashion activism translates into genuine impact.

Furthermore, the commercialization of political and social movements underlines another significant challenge. Imagery, expressions and emblems on clothing can be perceived as commodifying and trivializing serious concerns (Galloway, 2020). Critics argue that reducing complex societal issues to marketable trends devalues the causes that one is alluding to (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006). One may even gamble the term "performative activism". This expression contemplates the idea of an individual or a company undertaking activism by posting on social media or wearing socially aware apparel, without making real change (Dover, 2020). Such efforts may appear to be advocacy, however, it avoids fundamental difficulties.

Moreover, fashion activism may promote shopping as a social solution (Chua, Chrisman and De Massis, 2015). This means that promoting social issues through

purchasing may perpetuate consumerism and overconsumption, overshadowing structural change (Saxberg, 2014).

Finally, fashion's participation in social change is commendable and has raised awareness and financial assistance for vital causes. However, these obstacles and critiques must be acknowledged. Fashion activism must be authentic, noncommercial, and committed to serious action to alter society.

Chapter 6: Global impact and implications

i. The spread of American political fashion trends.

The global reach of American politics and fashion trends is a significant aspect of the 2020 Presidential Election's impact. It is clear that American political fashion has influenced political discourse globally (Nan, Li, and Zeng, 2021). As previously analyzed, the American political fashion movement, within the context of the year 2020, was influenced by campaign items and symbolism. The "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) baseball cap, popularized by former President Donald Trump's campaign, became a symbol of conservatism and international attention (Nan, Li, and Zeng, 2021). Its appearance at international rallies and marches showed American political fashion's worldwide appeal. American political officials' iconic fashion decisions, such as the clothes chosen during overseas diplomatic missions, further spread these trends (Givhan, 2016). These choices often affected overseas opinions of American politics diplomatically. As noted throughout this thesis, the global spread of American political dress trends shows how fashion influences political expression and communication in our linked society.

ii. Cross-cultural perspectives on political fashion

For a more complete comprehension of the political fashion discussion, we must emphasize the necessity for cultural awareness in fashion diplomacy by examining how different cultures react to political fashion statements.

During the 2020 Election season, fashion was exploited as a means of self-expression, and was simultaneously affected by the climate of division in America. Clothing and accessories became strong instruments for people to express their political views and support or, on the contrary, withstand leaders and causes.

We can now conclude, without a doubt, that political fashion has been about more than just personal style. It signified political tribal membership (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Wearing certain clothes showed one's principles and ideas as well as looks. Fashion choices reflected political divisiveness beyond the voting booth (Abramowitz, 2020).

Moreover, fashion labels and designers contributed to this radical polarization of opinions. Some brands overtly supported political ideas, while others remained neutral to avoid losing customers (Swinford, 2020). For instance, the fashion company Balenciaga launched a line with political themes like "Vote," capitalizing on election enthusiasm. Knowing their political remarks may affect consumer views and loyalty, brands and designers had to choose their strategy wisely (Kim, 2020).

Fashion as a political battleground showed the severity of the current polarization of ideologies, not only in the United States, but in the entire world. To summarize, the 2020 Presidential Election showed how fashion and politics are deeply linked, highlighting clothing as a form of visual and ideological expression.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

- i. Summary of key findings.

The year 2020 marked a critical juncture in history when the fashion industry found itself at the intersection of political polarization, social activism, and public health crises. This convergence of factors emphasized the industry's potential to become a transformative force in a world grappling with complex geopolitical issues. Fashion, once perceived primarily as a frivolous pursuit, is now thrust into the spotlight as a vehicle for political expression, social change, and economic adaptation.

In present times, there is no doubt that fashion is a lot more than a trivial topic when it comes to a reflection on geopolitical issues. Fashion can showcase a notion of cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and ambitions of an individual and/or of a group. To put it simply:

“Fashion is not simply the creation of designers. It is an image full of references and ideas that echoes the context of an era. It mirrors different aspects such as image, self-esteem, politics, beauty standards, technological innovations, street fashion, and more. The relationship between fashion and society is a two-way street. So that one is directly influenced by the other and vice-versa.” (Vilaça, 2021).

Therefore, the reflection of global political issues through the materialization of fashion relies on the construction of symbols and meanings. When there is cross-cultural sensitivity, visual signifiers can then be introduced in garments in order for anyone to understand what it stands for, regardless of a possible linear meaning. On many occasions, the creation of those symbols is spontaneous and easily recognizable by individuals.

Our conclusion resides on the importance of the longevity of fashion as a tool for power. The political episodes mentioned become relevant due to the constant reinterpretations of the materials and abstract ideas. Meanings and visual symbols change as a result of context. Because fashion is a form of representation of several levels of power, we understand that it is its very singularity of identity construction and individual manifestations of ideologies, in a specific time and place, that lay emphasis on a sense of

uniformity, leading to more visibility towards the Presidential Election in the United States in 2020. The risks involve the manipulation of visual elements and consequently ideologies when fashion extrapolates beyond its own scope and meddles with politics.

For fashion to produce significant cultural change, there must be an alignment between the industry and society. This implies a relevant revision of cultural values and behavior patterns when it comes to producing relevant changes in the world. There is no doubt that the fashion industry had severe implications on the 2020 Presidential Election as they were one of the most involved industries in the subject. Not only through social media but also by implementing grave changes on a business level. The end result was wider and more spread knowledge about the voting procedures, especially in youth demographics.

It is now evident that the connection between politics and fashion is embedded in power relations and cultural discourses in our globalized world. The current dynamic of the ongoing pandemic and the outcomes of the 2020 Presidential Election in the United States present an occasion for us to closely monitor each development. However, the uncertain nature of the future may limit our examination to recent events, impeding our ability to analyze the situation with a higher degree of objectivity and preventing us from waiting for a more settled state. Overall, we conclude that the fashion industry is a tool for change in the sense that it definitely plays a role in engaging its public in contested issues, and pushing for systemic impact.

ii. Implications for the fashion industry.

This research has significant implications for the fashion industry, as it navigates an ever-evolving landscape intersecting fashion, politics, and social responsibility. Fashion companies, designers, and stakeholders must recognize that fashion is now a powerful tool for political expression, social change, and global dialogue.

Firstly, fashion businesses should reframe their businesses to adjust to social responsibility (Entwistle, 2015). As commented on this research paper, brand relevance may be increased by addressing political and social problems that match their audience ideals. Fashion businesses that support relevant causes appeal to socially aware consumers.

Another relevant requirement is to seek transparency in sourcing, manufacturing, and ethical practices (Fletcher and Tham, 2020). In addition, supply chain and sustainability transparency develop confidence with fashion consumers concerned about environmental and social effects.

To conclude, during the 2020 Presidential Election Campaign, the fashion domain is at a critical point of change. This means that social responsibility, transparency, and sustainability are not just ethical but necessary for long-term success. Brands that master this new terrain will succeed and contribute to developing a fashion industry that is more responsible and conscientious.

iii. Contributions to the global discussion.

The research's contributions to the broader global discussion on fashion, politics, and social change are elaborated upon this thesis. This study advances our understanding of the role of fashion in contemporary society. Furthermore, this research contributes to the worldwide dialogue on fashion, politics, and social change by shedding light on key aspects of this dynamic interaction concentrated around the 2020 Presidential Election.

Firstly, we showcased how fashion may be used for political expression and communication in modern culture, proving that political actors' wardrobe choices may transmit beliefs and principles (Entwistle, 2015; Givhan, 2016).

And lastly, American political fashion patterns during the 2020 election showed fashion's global reach as a cultural and political phenomenon (Finkelstein, 2013; Nan, Li, and Zeng, 2021). Overall, this study expands global discourse by examining the dynamic interplay between fashion, politics, and social change during a crucial election year and a worldwide health crisis.

iv. Future directions for research.

We wish to conclude this study by suggesting avenues for future research in the fields of fashion, politics, and cultural studies, and by identifying areas where further investigation could deepen our understanding of this dynamic intersection.

The 2020 Presidential Election put forward the connection between fashion, politics, and culture, opening new and intriguing research roads. We can depict several themes that academics and researchers might wish to further explore within this dynamic field.

One promising area for future research is the cross-cultural analysis of political fashion. This research acknowledged the global significance of American political fashion trends, however, it should have further examined how various cultures perceive and respond to them. Fashion's reception and influence depend on cultural, historical, and geographical factors (Miller and Woodward, 2018). Comparative research might shed light into how political fashion statements change across cultures.

Another interesting path to delve further into research would be the Fashion Diplomacy and International Relations domain. Scholars can study how governments and international organizations use fashion for cultural exchange, diplomacy, and collaboration (Bjerg, 2019). Case studies of diplomatic clothing, state visits, and cultural exchanges allow us to examine fashion's role in global relations (Bennett, 2005).

Moreover, digital technology has changed social movements and fashion advocacy. Future studies might examine how social media platforms spread fashion's message and mobilize groups for social and political concerns (Barlow and Buhler, 2021). It can develop into intriguing research exploring how internet channels for fashion activism and advocacy affect societal change in the digital age.

Finally, the realm of political fashion ethics requires further study. Fashion activism and expression raise ethical issues that scholars may study (Barnard, 2014). This research can elucidate on authenticity, cultural appropriation, and fashion companies and their customers' ethical fashion choices.

In conclusion, the dynamic interplay between fashion, politics, and culture continues to evolve, offering many research opportunities. Scholars from numerous fields can help us comprehend in more depth this complex relationship and reveal how fashion influences our world.

v. Final thoughts and reflections.

This thesis concludes with final thoughts and reflections on the overarching themes explored throughout the research. It underscores the significance of fashion as a medium of expression, a catalyst for change, and a reflection of our evolving society. History shows that fashion is a lasting force that changes our world. Fashion's impact on political discourse and societal transformation proves its revolutionary power. It has become a dynamic platform for communicating beliefs and goals beyond couture houses and runways. It reveals political views, expresses identities, and mobilizes social movements.

As a matter of fact, Covid-19 ushered us in a new age of fashion innovation, sustainability, and ethics. It made customers aware of their environmental and social impact, forcing fashion businesses to change. Sustainability and responsible sourcing are becoming fashion essentials.

We conclude this exercise by arguing that fashion has become a diplomatic weapon that promotes international relations and cultural exchange due to its worldwide reach. Fashion's global impact on the 2020 Presidential Election showed how it affects global views and conversations.

We complete this voyage with a deep realization: fashion reflects our ideals, objectives, and problems. It is a beacon of transformation, urging us to rethink the world we want to build and our responsibilities in it. Fashion is a global signifier of power and prestige in an image-driven world, but it also transforms society beyond buying symbolic and fashionable objects. Fashion's legacy is one of endurance, inventiveness, and self-expression.

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