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Fashion film as a brand action. The case of Europa II in Vogue

El fashion film como acción de la marca. El caso de Europa II en Vogue

Abstract

This paper studies the fashion film as a marketing tool through the study of the short film Europa II by Vogue. Initially, the research delves into fashion, the Vogue brand, the nature of fashion film as an advertising format, and the importance of brand partnerships. Next, an exploratory study seeks to identify the associations of the Vogue brand present in Europa II. The methodology starts from a semiotic analysis focused on extracting those associations (references and cultural values latent in it) from the narrative proposal of Europa II, thereby identifying the meanings present in its narrative, those that ultimately speak about the brand, about how it wants to be perceived. Later, the resulting associations were contrasted through an interview with seven experts in the field of marketing and/or communication. It was concluded that Europa II assists Vogue to rejuvenate its target and, therefore, connect with new audiences. Hence, brand associations provide a turning point in terms of the persuasive power of Europa II, connecting narrative analysis with the meaning of the brand.

Resumen

Este trabajo estudia el fashion film como herramienta de marketing a través del estudio del cortometraje Europa II de Vogue. En primer lugar, la investigación profundiza en la moda, en la marca Vogue, en la propia naturaleza del fashion film como formato publicitario, y en la importancia de las asociaciones de marca. En segundo lugar, se lleva a cabo un estudio exploratorio que identifica las asociaciones de la marca Vogue presentes en Europa II. La metodología empleada parte de un análisis semiótico centrado en extraer aquellas asociaciones (referencias y valores culturales latentes en él) desde la propuesta narrativa de Europa II, identificando así los significados presentes en su narrativa, aquellos que en definitiva hablan de la marca, de cómo quiere ser percibida. Hecho esto, se contrastaron las asociaciones resultantes mediante una entrevista a siete expertos en el ámbito del marketing y/o la comunicación. De entre las principales conclusiones, cabe destacar que Europa II sirve a Vogue para rejuvenecer su target y, por ende, conectar con nuevos públicos. Las asociaciones de marca aportan de este modo un punto de inflexión en cuanto al poder persuasivo de Europa II, conectando el análisis narrativo con el significado de la marca.

Keywords
Fashion films; Branded content; Persuasive communication; Brand associations; Brand strategy; fashion

Palabras clave
Fashion films; Branded content; Comunicación persuasiva; Asociaciones de marca; Estrategia de marca; Moda

1. Introduction

Vogue magazine was founded in 1892, celebrating the feminine ideal of the era: "the domestic angel" (Velasco, 2019: 166), although it was aimed at an audience of younger, more modern and wealthy women. Since then there have been any number of attempts to modernise the Vogue brand, both by harnessing new technologies (in 2010 Vogue relaunched its website and in 2012 created an application), and by positioning the brand within feminism.

In 2004, Vogue dedicated its cover to the women ministers of the new PSOE Government of Spain and in 2015, to the Italian *influencer* Chiara Ferragni. The former received intense criticism on its focus on the women's interest in fashion rather than their political skills (Velasco, 2019). Vogue's representation of women, and the feminine, still seemed remote from feminist ideals, portraying women as domestic, wives and employees: "the issue promoted the same established roles for men and women in society since time immemorial" (Luque & Pérez, 2018: 147). The latter cover was aimed at expanding the readership of the magazine, seeing the followers of Chiara Ferragni as possible consumers (Velasco, 2019).

Nevertheless, Vogue is widely regarded as routine and old-fashioned, failing to establish its position on the internet. Sales have fallen since the 1980's despite efforts to modernise the brand, reflecting the lack of effective strategies to surprise, connect and/or reconnect with consumers (Ramos-Serrano & Pineda, 2009). According to Condé Nast (2018), Vogue readers have an average age of 37 and their sources of inspiration and purchasing decisions are magazines or fashion websites followed by print media. These women, although they take the opinions of others into consideration, prefer to make their decisions directly, without professional advice[1].

Influencers have become a key element in brand strategies to connect with consumers, with good results (García, 2017). If classic or traditional advertising (intrusive) sought to reach the masses through repetitive messaging, where the product is the central feature and focus. Consumers are now less willing to be guided by brands (Godin & Bravo, 2006), hence the need for experiential marketing focussing not on the product itself but rather calling attention to the brand (Del Pino & Castelló, 2015), provoking emotions that positively connect with the brand and incorporating it into a lifestyle (Costa-Sánchez, 2014).

But it is not only through *influencers* that the consumer finds affinity with brands; cinematic narratives represent a different way for consumers to know and connect with brands. This type of communication incorporates the following elements: the prosumer (Toffler, 1980), a receptor who actively participates in the communication (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2014; Costa-Sánchez, 2014; Martin, 2015) and dissemination of brand experiences with which they have an emotional connection (De Assis, 2014; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2011); the use of new narrative techniques using formats that allow a combination of different artistic idioms (such as cinema, music and fashion) and offer a new type of entertainment (Arbaiza, 2017); and an intent beyond mere advertising, aiming to achieve an emotional connection between the receptor and brand values (Gobé, 2010). This paper will explore these types of actions, specifically *fashion films* and, in particular, *Europa II*, the *fashion film* produced by Vogue to expand their brand reach and attract new consumers. We will analyse the importance and impact of the brand associations within these narratives to reach their audience.

We will also note how, far from democratising brand access, *fashion films* have the opposite effect: the clearest example being known as the "Burberry effect", with the creation of the Burberry Prorsum line at a higher price range, positioning Burberry on par with other luxury brands (Moore & Birtwistle, 2004).

2. Frame of reference

2.1. *Advertainment* and branded content

Advertainment or *branded content*[2] is essentially a new form of communication between advertiser and audience, using formats and tools which are attractive to consumers and which reflect the demands of contemporary society (Imbert, 2003). As opposed to *product placement*, where a product is inserted into the content, here the product itself becomes the content (Arbaiza & Huertas, 2018) as a new way to engage with users and share experiences (Del Pino, Castelló & Ramos-Soler, 2013).

> Branded Content is a communication asset produced or co-produced by a brand offering entertainment, information and/or utility, transmitting the brand values and engaging with a target audience who voluntarily dedicate their attention (BCMA Spain, s.f.).

The most salient characteristics of *branded content* are (Del Pino & Castelló, 2015; Arbaiza & Huertas, 2018): 1) the use of *Big data* to identify the tastes, interests, preferences and lifestyles of users; 2) *storytelling*, a coherent narrative expressing the values and emotions the brand wishes to convey; 3) virality: *branded content* adapts to different mediums but largely seeks to use non-conventional channels such as social media; and 4) transmedia storytelling, where the consumer becomes the prosumer,

actively participating in the generation of content and promoting it through their engagement. There are generally three formats: fiction, videogames and virtual, networked entertainment spaces (Ramos, 2006).

This has given rise to new genres, new tools and new talent. *Fashion films* are a prime example of this: online shorts containing or dealing with aspects of fashion that can be produced by both professionals and neophytes alike (Skjulstad & Morrison, 2016) and whose format defies and transcends categories, genres and contexts of cultural production. Authors speak of genre ecologies, a series of characteristics which define the digital era, such as the reuse and recombination of contents, styles and forms. This is closely associated with the *fashion film*, given that these are free from the strictures of formal genres and, as products of the internet era and social media, have an ecologically complex and communicatively fluid function. Thus, the *fashion film* offers greater creative freedom, able to appropriate and draw from other art forms while being unconstrained by the formal expectations of the audience. These films serve to transmit the brand identity and values, generate the emotional engagement of consumers who can viralise the content (Guerrero & González-Díez, 2019).

Fashion lies within the liminal space between art, industry and culture, playing an ever more important and recreative role in cultural production (Taylor, 2005). With digital technologies, the synergies between fashion brands and the arts have become increasingly evident, with fashion brands participating in architectural projects, collaborating with museums or incursions into cinema (Uhlirova, 2013). The result is a hybridisation, the focus of this case study.

2.2. Hybridisation between cinema and fashion: a historic relationship

The relationship between cinema and fashion, modern industries *par excellence*, dates back to the origins of both, with innumerable direct contacts and interactions (Uhlirova, 2013). A pioneer of this relationship was Georges Méliès, who between 1898 and 1900 produced ads for Mystère corsets and Delion hats (Bessy & Duca, 1961). *Fifty years of Paris fashions, 1859-1909* (1910), first screened in London, is considered the first fashion film (Leese, 1991), and Paul Poiret was the first couturier to embrace the cinema in 1911 with a complete film history of his designs (Evans, 2001).

The medium of cinema offers a showcase for fashion apparel, the true protagonists of the films unaccompanied by narrative or plot; the mere display of the clothing was an incentive to buy (Uhlirova, 2010). This period also saw the appearance of the newsreel or '*cinemagazine*', which quickly became the principal format for the dissemination of the latest fashions, including advice on how to dress aimed at sophisticated and fashion conscious middle-class women (Uhlirova, 2013). From the 1930's to the 1950's, the Golden Age of Hollywood, *cinemagazines* became renowned for their use of actresses as fashion models (Díaz & García, 2016), although by the 1950's fashion photographers themselves began to take serious interest in cinema (Lawford, 1985), producing a number of experimental films (Mijovic, 2013).

A proliferation of television programs about fashion would follow, as well as the appearance of boutique fashion outlets aiming to create a brand universe in which clients identity with the brand with all five senses (Wickstrom, 2006). Fashion firms aim to transmit a lifestyle and values around their brands, spurring online sales and internationalisation (Manlow & Nobbs, 2013). In this effort, spaces are more important than the products: aiming to create a place of encounter with art using atmospheric videos, music, etc (Díaz & García, 2016); videos are an essential aspect of the visual experience of live fashion shows. This was the origin of multisensorial marketing, where designers experimented with the emotions produced by the interaction of clothing and the body depicted through video. The new century would see the incorporation of digital technologies into catwalk shows, becoming truly multimedia spectacles (Uhlirova, 2013).

It may be said that the rise of sensorial experiences and new technologies marked the birth of *fashion films*; luxury brands began to invest heavily to produce films with famous directors and disseminate them *online*. Chanel, Dior and Louis Vuitton are considered pioneers in enlisting leading directors for their films and they have since been joined by other firms such as Prada, Proenza Schouler or H&M; however, luxury firms have primarily used *fashion films* to transmit the brand experience to wider audiences, regardless of social class (Díaz & García, 2016). For the luxury goods industry, *fashion films* offer an opportunity to develop the abstract aspects of their identity, communicated through experiences and emotions (Guerrero & González-Díez, 2019).

In 2009, the first *International Fashion Film Festival* was held in La Jolla, San Diego (USA) to recognise the most creative products and directors in the world of fashion. In the 9th edition of the festival, *Europa II* was proclaimed the best film and Imanol Ruiz de Lara, best director. Since then other major cities have joined the initiative, with important festivals now being held in Madrid and Barcelona, Spain.

2.3. *Fashion film*: advertising narratives and aesthetic pleasure

The *fashion film* can be considered as a uniquely digital genre, an internet genre, originating at the start of the 21st century (Uhlirova, 2013; Skjulstad & Morrison, 2016) with very specific aims in terms of social action (Miller, 1984):

> Short audio-visual productions at the service of a brand, characterised by a communicative style where beauty and a carefully crafted aesthetic, inherited from fashion photography, predominate in the image and messaging of the product and/or brand itself (Del Pino & Castelló, 2015: 14).

The *fashion film* shares with *branded content* the use of *storytelling* and the quest for virality, but it also has certain unique characteristics (Mijovic, 2013; Caerols & De la Horra, 2015; Del Pino & Castelló, 2015; Arbaiza & Huertas, 2018; Kam, Robledo-Dioses & Atarama-Rojas, 2019): 1) a carefully crafted visual aesthetic; 2) shorts, generally between one and five minutes in length, longer than traditional advertising spots; 3) a fast-paced narrative style; 4) generating emotions through a cinematic experience; 5) serialisation; and 6) diverse themes and limited dialogue.

Furthermore, *fashion films* can be separated into three types (Mijovic, 2013): 1) non-narrative, 2) conventional narratives, and 3) organic narratives; these types depend on the form of storytelling and the manner in which products or brands are incorporated into the film; in the majority of *fashion films,* products or brands are relegated to a second plane. The aim is to establish an emotional connection with the consumer for which the product itself is not necessary and may not even appear.
An increasing number of firms are turning to *fashion films* as a way to experiment and to create a bond with clients most commonly through narration, serialisation and aesthetic pleasure (Díaz & García, 2016).

1. Narration refers to the story itself, which is fundamental to seduce the viewer and make them a participant in the communication. Narration is an essential aspect of the construction of human identity (Ricoeur, 1996).

2. Serialisation helps generate expectation in the consumer, awaiting the release of the next instalment, enticing the audience to remain connected with the brand.

3. Aesthetic pleasure, as mentioned above, is achieved by enlisting leading cinema directors and fashion photographers to produce the films as they have much greater knowledge of the medium and techniques to generate empathy, seduce and immerse the spectator in the narrative universe of the film.

The objective is to create content with emotional, sensorial and cognitive experiences that construct a brand image and build consumer loyalty driving emotional and irrational purchasing decisions (Atwal & Williams, 2009).

These films also serve to bring high fashion into the world of art, not only through synergies with cinema but also through the conception of fashion as an art form in itself, a notion which has often been contested (Miller, 2007). The *fashion film* can give a more intense aesthetic experience of textures, movement and creative concepts than a classic catwalk show, attracting the consumer through an emotional experience with the brand (Michaud, 2015).

2.4. *Fashion films, brand associations*

Fashion films can help position brands within the mind of consumers, connecting to their desires, tastes and emotion and moulding their perceptions, since, ultimately, the brand exists in the manner and to the extent it is perceived by the consumer (Fournier, 1998).

Currently, consumption is intense, ephemeral (products quickly sell out or become outmoded) and imposed (consumption is a rule) (Bauman, 2007). Within this context, the consumer needs to trust in a brand, perceive its humanity (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2018); hence the importance of brand associations which, according to Llopis (2015), are feelings, convictions and knowledge consumer gain through their own experiences (use of the product) and those of others (word-of-mouth) of a brand. For Keller (2008), brand associations are information nodes between the brand and consumers, differentiating the brand and forming basic associations (for example, the attributes and benefits the product has to offer), secondary connections (links through other entities), and even unique conceptions.

Associations are woven in the mind of consumers through brand awareness and brand image; brands impact consumers in two ways: recognition, where the consumer can identify the brand in any context; and memory, referring to the relating of the brand with certain categories of previously known products (Keller, 1993; 2008). Recognition is the primary aspect, followed by memory, leading to what is referred to as *top of mind awareness* (Aaker, 1991). Brand image refers to how the consumer perceives the brand based

on the stimuli provided, which will stimulate, or not, their preferences, translating into *brand equity* (Keller, 1993; Llopis, 2015). Brand associations depend on a number of classifications[3], especially as intermediaries between firms and clients. Ultimately, these associations are stamped into the mind of consumers through direct or indirect experiences, thus constructing the image and awareness of the brand.

Brands must manage their communications strategies consistently and ensure an emotional payoff to clients in order for their purchases to have meaning (Aaker & Álvarez, 2014). The digital environment is the ideal field to build brand awareness which, according to Rubalcava, Sánchez-Tovar and Sánchez-Limón (2019), can be further energised by social media when brands transmit quality content which users speak of and share (word-of-mouth). Digital media offer the opportunity to viralise content, surprising consumers and creating new associations that drive consumption; Antolín and Clemente (2017) explain how a number of brands have used YouTube to showcase their products. A specific example they note is the *Epic Split* video with Jean Claude Van Damme by Volvo, with striking images that suggest positive associations in the mind of viewers.

Brands must transmit meaning using long-term communication strategies that are both consistent and energetic, incorporating memorable actions (Aaker & Álvarez, 2014), creating, reinforcing and revitalising brand associations (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2008), boosting recognition and memory through these meanings, and thus incentivising consumption. This, as expressed by Kotler and Keller (2012: 482) is "the foundation of brand equity".

Latif, Islam and Noor (2014) note that awareness can be furthered by various means, including advertising spots; *fashion films* may fall into a separate category; they offer a narrative of the brand, associating it with the values that create *top of mind awareness*. Buffo (2017) explains how brands that use this format *'narrate'* their essence, creating structured fictions that can be distinguished on three levels: tell a story, express a personality (a celebrity performing actions that portray the brand), and create an atmosphere, capturing the spirit and essence of the brand. These aspects can be linked to *branding*, and the aim is clear: narrations ascribe meaning to the brand; these become associations in the minds of consumers for them to know and remember the brand. The cinematographic narration of high fashion thus becomes a means of *engagement*, revitalising intentions, generating experiences, expectations and satisfactions.

3. Objectives and methodology

The aim of this study is to analyse the *fashion film Europa II* by Vogue Spain, and its strategy to position the brand in the mind of consumers by expressing certain values. The study has the following specific objectives: O1, explore the phenomenon of *fashion films*, their relation to other advertising formats and the implications for the brand; O2, extract the meanings or references embedding in the *fashion film Europa II*, identifying the associations suggested by the brand as part of a strategy to reach a target audience; O3, analyse these associations with experts in the field of marketing and/or communication. This will help illustrate the strategy of the brand with *Europa II*, its objectives, the values ascribed to specific brand associations and, possibly, the results of the initiative.

We propose the hypothesis that *Europa II* represents a strategy by Vogue to expand its brand associations to reach a new and different consumer profile. We will evaluate whether Vogue was effective in enhancing its brand image, raising brand awareness and the role of the brand associations within the *fashion film*.

The methodology used to achieve these objectives is as follows:

1) A bibliographical overview of *fashion films* and their place within the field of advertising and marketing.

2) Semiotic analysis of the narrative of *Europa II*. The film was divided into four segments as basic units of content (Cassetti & DiChio, 2007). Each segment was analysed as follows: 1) a description of the content (Serrano, 2001), outlining the action taking place during the segment, and 2) a critical interpretation of each segment, extracting allusions, references and cultural values (meanings) embedded in the segment, particularly with regards to notions of feminism, femininity and *mainstream* culture. These imbue the narrative with meanings, motivations and values (Pérez, 2014), that is, brand associations communicated to the consumer. By distilling the meaning from these associations we can have a conceptual understanding of the brand image expressed by *Europa II*. Following the classification by Aaker (1996: 84-85), the extracted associations will be symbolic, having a specific importance and weight in terms of the cultural meaning they bring to the brand[4]. Each reference will be evaluated and articulated in relation to specific cultural aspects in order to understand what Vogue wishes to say with *Europa II*.

3) Interviews with experts in the field of communication and/or marketing. Using a questionnaire of 19 questions structured into 5 blocks the seven participants provided key information during two months, February and November, 2020 (see Table 1):

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants

Code	Gender	Profession
HCC	Man	Communications consultant
HGSD	Man	Global Sales Director
MAC	Woman	Communications company director
MPAC	Woman	Professor and communications company director
HGML	Man	Global Luxury Marketing
MPIM	Woman	Professor of fashion and intangibles management
MAC2	Woman	Communications company director

Source: the author

The process for gathering empirical information was as follows: 1) construct a matrix using codes drawn from the semiotic analysis serving to structure the interview into blocks: Block 1: information of the participant, Block 2: Vogue Spain and the brand strategy, Block 3: strategic intentions of the *fashion film*, Block 4: brand image and awareness, and Block 5: brand associations; and 2) to encode and analyse the responses of participants using these codes.

4. Results

4.1. Semiotic analysis

The film *Europa II* was divided into 4 fragments, indicating the duration of each: prologue, presentation of the brand, meeting of Yao Yao-Ingrid, and game of Yao Yao and Ingrid for *Europa II*. The contents/ events of each fragment were described and then analysed to identify the cultural references embedded in each fragment.

Table 2: Identified references or values

Fragment	Synthesis of the identified references or values
1) Prologue: presentation of the videogame *Europa II* and its mission. Yao Yao plays with the Arcade videogame until her boss unplugs the machine. Duration: 00:00 - 00:42	Nostalgia, allusions to a 1980's aesthetic (video Arcade); feminism in relation to various fields: 1) the conquest of space (women included in this endeavour); 2) women playing videogames, when women are underrepresented in this context (especially in the narration of videogames); and 3) music, the lead singer of the band in soundtrack is a young woman, so connecting with the target audience of the brand.
2) Presentation of the brand: appearance of Vogue in the credits while Ingrid arrives at the bar. Duration: 00:43 - 01:13	Science fiction films, using a sci-fi aesthetic recalling films such as *Blade Runner* (Deeley, Laurizika & Scott, 1982), and fashion, with the clear presence of the Vogue, contextualising the narrative with music and Ingrid walking dreamily down a hallway.
3) Meeting of Yao Yao-Ingrid: interaction between the two until the token is inserted in the machine to restart the game. Duration: 01:14 - 04:07	Science fiction films, as the *Europa II* universe alludes to social strata including 'human' / 'non-human', 'dominator' / 'dominated'; feminism in relation to the music: the song in this fragment coincides with the moment of liberation of the protagonists; and feminism in relation to videogames since a woman finds the key to entering in the game and defy a whole set of rules.
4) Game of Yao Yao and Ingrid for *Europa II*: the protagonists enter the videogame itself and defeat their final opponent (final credits included). Duration: 04:08 - 07:32	Science fiction films, as the protagonists enter the game universe the real world is transformed, inviting first Yao Yao to defy the rules and finally both fight and win against the *final boss*; feminism, as both protagonists break the rules and save *Europa II*, a metaphor for the new roles of women. In turn, feminism connects to other fields: 1) videogames, given the role taken on by the protagonists in the *Europa II* universe; and 2) science fiction films since both transmit their feminine essence to the virtual world, achieving their goal.

Source: the author

The references or values identified in each fragment are shown in Table 2. The perceived nostalgia for an earlier videogame aesthetic and cinematic references to previous decades suggest we are within a world where everything is possible, where the feminine takes on a newfound protagonism. Feminism is thus associated with the world of videogames, both at an extradiegetic (the protagonists play the videogame), and diegetic level (the protagonists are inside the game and save *Europa II*).

Feminine ability, tied to the cinematographic imaginary, specifically to science fiction, suggests a vision of a capable, modern womanhood (here fashion is another key element with participating firms) of the future. Here, Vogue looks to both present and future, to a youthful, active, dynamic, uninhibited femininity. The aesthetic *surround* is reinforced by the music, by a group (*MOW*) which connects with this type of woman and the contemporary digital environment (MOW's success is largely due to digital platforms).

According to this analysis, Vogue is clearly aiming at a young audience, with specific tastes, interests and concerns. The aim is not to offer fashion, but rather a vision of femininity and of the world. Together, these references, signifying a set of implicit meanings, create a symbolic character representing the target audience Vogue intends to attract, thus, revitalising the brand with a contemporary and potentially viral high-end format (recall the case of Burberry mentioned above).

4.2. Interviews with experts

According to experts, the target audience of Vogue magazine are middle, upper-middle and upper class women, aged from 30 to 55, lovers of fashion and "interested in personal image, design and their social image" (HCC). The values most associated with Vogue Spain are: luxury, fashion, exclusivity, elegance and style (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Value tree of Vogue Spain

Source: the author

As a format, the *fashion film* is an increasingly prevalent, hybrid genre which, along with other formats, offers a space for experimentation and creativity serving "to give an exclusive form of materiality to intangible luxury" (MPIM). *Fashion films* are therefore ideal for generating *buzz*, awareness and consumer loyalty. *Fashion films* in general invite artistic and aesthetic experimentation, "it is culture, modernity, fashion, experimentation, etc." (MPIM).

All participants in the study agreed that *Europa II* represents a transgressive bid to rejuvenate the brand image of Vogue Spain and reach new audiences: "a younger audience that, most likely, does not have an emotional connection to the brand" (MAC2). The film offers a fresh image, "international and avant-garde, emphasising fashion and style" (HCC), and no doubt will serve to connect with a younger audience providing Vogue perseveres in using the appropriate channels and media to reach this target. This cannot be an isolated attempt since 'one off' actions have no lasting impact.

All participants, with one exception, agreed that this represents a break with Vogue's traditional communication strategy which, given its originality and creativity, successfully enhances brand awareness and recognition. Specifically, "*Europa II* achieves this through its production values: the film and director were widely acclaimed, winning *Best Fashion Film* and *Best Director* at the festival in La Jolla, USA; this can only enhance the image and recognition of the brand" (MAC).

Nevertheless, the majority of participants agreed that the *fashion film* did not influence their own view of the brand, perhaps because they were already familiar with Vogue and perceive it "as an innovative brand pursuing and promoting creative actions such as *Europa II*" (MPIM). Only one participant felt their image of the brand had changed. They considered Vogue a classic brand and viewing the *fashion film* had changed their perception, now describing the brand as: "innovative, eclectic, digital, *vintage*, etc." (MAC).

This is in line with the opinion of the majority of the experts (five), who believe the *fashion film* alters the image of the brand, ascribing new attributes which "modernise the brand and introduce new aesthetic models far removed from a more classic image" (MAC2). According to one participant, *Europa II* contains contemporary cultural references, a reinterpretation that gives the *fashion film* originality while "Vogue resignifies the content, becoming the medium or vehicle through which the audio-visual message is transmitted. In the digital world, the vehicle and the message are the same construct" (MAC).

The opinions of the participants regarding the references/values identified in the semiotic analysis are provided in Table 3:

Table 3: Opinion of the experts regarding identified references or values

References/values	Opinion of the experts
1) Nostalgia	Although the experts do not agree on the value of nostalgia, the majority perceive this as a form of modernity, that is, the evolution of the magazine towards something more modern while recalling the history of the brand.
2) Feminism	Five of the participants did not believe that feminism is an association in this *fashion film* but is related to the history of the Vogue brand itself; the other two did perceive an association, particularly in the relation between the protagonists, a *sorority*, a reflection of contemporary social realities.
3) Science fiction and fashion	While participants considered the association between science fiction and Vogue to be a way to refresh the image of the brand and an artistic technique, they did note the connection between science fiction and fashion, clearly present in the *fashion film Europa II*. One participant believed this connected with feminism by using sci-fi as a means for the protagonists to achieve their dreams; as another participant remarked, its allows them to "dream, laugh and enjoy" (MPAC).
4) Videogame	In the case of the association with videogames the responses were mixed: two participants did not find any link and another referred to digitalisation. The participants did connect this with other aspects, such as feminism (by breaking traditional masculine stereotype), modernity and retro, nostalgia which (as noted above) connects with contemporary modernity and with fashion.
5) Soundtrack	The soundtrack of the film exudes modernity and the digital technology as the band's success is largely through online platforms. Another participant perceives the music as fun, quirky, catchy, connecting with the fresh, dynamic image mentioned by three other participants.

Source: the author.

Finally, all the participants believed the association between Vogue and Gucci was apt and fitting. The Gucci brand endows Vogue with an image of luxury and high fashion, attributes most repeated by the experts, in addition to: exclusivity, elitism, differentiation, aspiration, modernity, retro, *vintage*, prestige and notoriety.

To sum up, the *fashion film* is designed to rejuvenate the band image and to connect with younger women; the experts agreed that the associations are well placed, with the appeal to certain nostalgia at the forefront.

It is interesting to note that, according to one participant, interculturality is another association to be taken into account, along with youth, since the age of the protagonists may help connect with younger women, as opposed to Vogue's traditional core audience.

5. Discussion

The first objective of the study was to offer an overview of the origins and sources of *fashion films* and its association with the field of advertising and marketing. As brand actions, these films present associations which serve to enrich perceptions and set out narrative trends that are not separate from the brand, but rather create a universe in which these are prevalent in some form. The *fashion film* is a form of content that "reveals" aspects of the brand, normally without directly or explicitly alluding to it, but furthering *top of mind awareness* of the consumer in a more intense, vivid way. The film *Europa II* meets the theoretical aspects of the *fashion film*, using a technological and interactive narrative (both diegetic and non-diegetic) and through experience; here the experience is that of the protagonists, and in turn represent the "new Vogue woman".

Regarding the second objective of the study, this was also achieved with a semiotic analysis verifying the incorporation of five elements of high fashion narrative proposed by Wang and Juhlin (2020): history, style, characters, scenario and aesthetics; elements which provide the spectator-consumer with an experience related to fashion apparel. Additionally, a number of associations were drawn from the universe presented in *Europa II*, such as: science fiction cult films, the world of videogames, feminism, nostalgia, fashion and music. All of these include references with which the consumer may identify and thus connect them directly or indirectly to the brand that in turn acquires new meanings and associations with certain values in the mind of consumers. These meanings are conjured through a series of associations which connect Vogue with new users. This was confirmed, the final objective of the study, through interviews with seven experts in marketing and communication, the majority of whom perceived *Europa II* as a medium able to carve out new market niches by rejuvenating the brand universe.

In this context, the associations are perceived differently by the participants given the subjectivity of the theme in question: feminism is clearly present in the image of the brand, although, according to a significant majority of participants this is not a "genuine" association that freshly imbues the brand.

However, we observed certain contradictions. Feminism largely serves as a transversal vehicle via cinema and video-games, although some participants did not see the connection in the juxtaposition of "videogames-feminism" and "cinema (science fiction)-feminism". Some participants considered the involvement of women in these worlds to be self-evident and that no specific associations with feminism can be drawn; others dispute the notion that the aesthetics of the film have any relation to feminism. This raises the question: are aesthetics (in video-games or in films) no longer a powerful association for Vogue and therefore not relevant to the message they intend to transmit about women of today? The associations with fashion and music are pervasive through the prism of notions of novelty and differentiation and the *fashion film* offers a particularly differential value to these aspects.

All participants agreed in the effectiveness of *fashion films* in reaching new audiences and rejuvenating brand image, confirming our initial hypothesis; the utility of this format as an artistic product lies in "the creation of a brand imaginary" (Guerrero & González-Díez, 2019: 77) whose principal aim is to position the brand and its values in the mind of the consumer as spectator.

Europa II does not refer to Vogue but rather to the world of its new audience: brave, contemporary, uninhibited women, at home both in the real world and online. Fashion is not a decorative element but an instrument that manifests the capacity of today's woman to operate in the same spaces as men and take part in stories, myths and common dreams. Ingrid and Yao-Yao go far beyond what they could have possibly imagined; we see through specific situations and meanings that narrate the position of the brand, in this case, openness to new audiences. In this sense, the study of the associations underscores their power within the theoretical framework: associations lubricate the performance and value of the brand.

6. Conclusions

Navigating brand stories, creating and/or evaluating subjective interpretations is always a hazardous undertaking. The associations produced by individual perception of a brand are both deeply rooted and elusive, difficult to identify and verbalise. In this case, a semiotic analysis was made of *Europa II* to extract the associations in the form of meanings embedded in popular culture. Although on this occasion the analysis focussed on symbolic values, and so even more open to subjective interpretation, the basic outlines of the strategy can be discerned. We propose hereafter to take a semiotic approach to analysing *fashion films* using transmedia narratives and storytelling that combine diverse associations and to observe their interactions.

The culture of brands, their vision, mission and values, conditioned by KPI's, largely depends on the attributes of the brands and how these are perceived; that is, associations that 'humanise' the brand and position it in the mind of the consumer. Thus, the qualitative is no less important than the quantitative:

the connection of a brand to its clients and *stakeholders* is increasingly subject to emotional factors, and it is therefore imperative to undertake new and innovative actions that are attuned to the needs and desires of consumers.

7. Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. For this profile, the importance of *influencers* and social media are ranked fourth and fifth, respectively.

2. The interchangeability of these terms is disputed given the subtle differences between the two concepts. For Kam, Robledo-Dioses and Atarama-Rojas (2019), *branded entertainment* contains no allusions to the brand or product. The aim is to communicate a brand universe (values and community); in contrast, *advertainment* involves the explicit presence and positioning of the brand or product within the narrative. *Fashion films* range between the two depending on its narrative structure.

3. We can identify the following classification: in the dimension of product associations we find associations with the type of product, with its attributes, with quality, with usage, with the users of the product, with a country or organisation; for the business dimension we find associations with social responsibility, perceived quality, innovation (there are companies whose basic premiss is constant innovation, customer service, success, and its global/local characteristics; there are also personal associations, including associations with a personality or the concept of client-

brand relationship; and symbolic associations: the visual imaginary of the brand or the history/heritage of the brand (Aaker (1996) in Llopis, 2015).

4. When referring to symbols, the author especially focusses on brand logos, although clearly anything representing a brand can be a symbol. In this study we explore the importance of the symbol as association in terms of the visual aesthetics of *Europa II*, but focussing particularly on its meanings, references and/or values.