CHANGING STYLE IN STYLE-CHANGING INDUSTRIES: THE ROLE OF CRITICS AS GATEKEEPERS IN HIGH-END FASHION

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ABSTRACT

Mastering aesthetics is a precious source of competitive advantage in creative industries. In fashion, innovation is reflected by how and how much styles change. Elite designers claim to be the only endogenous force shaping fashion innovation season by season. Yet, each season, fashion critics vet the new collections these designers introduce, assessing what is original as opposed to reworked and uninspired, in this way playing a fundamental role as gatekeepers in setting taste within the industry. In this research, we document how stylistic innovation, vis-à-vis the styles premier design houses introduced each season, is impacted, among the others, by the specific exogenous force of critics' assessments of designers' past work. Our data, which include 61 measures detailing the styles introduced by 38 prestigious Italian and French design houses over a nine-year period, suggest designers move further away from styles reviewed less favourably while adhering more closely to styles reviewed more positively. Additionally, the styles a designer introduces are shown to depend on critical assessments of competing designers' styles, revealing how design houses attend to each other's work. This work documents the strong correlation between style dynamics and critics' feedback. It also has important implications for any company trying to find a balance between independence and conformity in setting its own unique positioning into the market.

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> Fashion designers are the dictator of tastes –Karl Lagerfeld
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> If you are a designer, sometimes it is better not to delegate, because someone pays money for something that you designed, so it should be exactly the way you want it, exactly the way you would have chosen it. (…) It is not a democracy – it is a dictatorship. –Tom Ford

Style has become a central differentiation factor across different contexts, and it 'is used, consciously or conscientiously, even in areas where function used to stand alone' (Postrel, 2003, p. 5). The beauty of style as a social phenomenon is in the paradoxes it evokes. Many scholars have started to explore its essence, and the role it plays for consumers and institutions alike as a signifier and a crucial driver of change. Simmel (1995) underlines that style has a Janus' face that comprises both individualization and socialization. For Schiermer (2009) style has an ephemeral nature that can be seen only in retrospect, even if in some sense every style 'appears as it would live forever' (Simmel, 1995, p. 33). A further complexity of style is its inner ambiguity. In Davis' terms style

> …is a low semanticity code (…). It can be best viewed as a quasi-code, which, although it must necessarily draw on the conventional visual and tactile symbols of a culture, does so allusively, ambiguously, and inchoately, so that meanings evoked by the combination and the permutations of the code's key terms are forever shifting or in process. (Davis, 1992, p. 5)

Style has a level of plasticity that other major concepts in the social sciences do not have: it is

> …a pattern of actions that can be observed and, to a certain extent, reproduced and coded. But this code is 'undercoded' in the sense that there may be some ambiguity and uncertainty in 'decoding'; in other words, various social groups may interpret a given style differently. (Godart, 2018, p. 109)

As Shrum (1991, p. 348) argues with respect to cultural products in general, 'the reception of a cultural object is a complex analytical phenomenon, involving consumption, incorporation or rejection, and diffusion over time and space'.

In this chapter, we focus on style dynamics in high-end fashion, where innovation is reflected in how and how much styles change over time. Consequently, world renowned designers like Alessandro Michele, Miuccia Prada and Nicolas Ghesquière working at prestigious design houses (e.g. Gucci, Prada and Balenciaga) devote themselves to creating original collections each season. Yet originality must be dispensed in just the right dose. Styles that change radically may be perceived as too avante garde, while styles that change only slightly may be perceived as too familiar. The critic plays a key role in deciding what the appropriate amount of change should be.

While designers portray themselves as innovators who set the rules of the fashion game independently – and they tend to be portrayed as such – in reality their autonomy in setting new stylistic patterns is only partial, and change comes from the interplay of various sources. Recent developments in the sociology of

culture highlight the importance of endogenous explanations of cultural phenomena (Kaufman, 2004). In our context, this means that there are no doubts that stylistic innovation today originates from different endogenous sources, complexly blending the central role of designers with the inputs from buyers, product managers and merchandisers. However, here we focus on one specific potential driver of change that remains exogenous to the fashion process, that is, critics or, as we will refer to in this chapter, gatekeepers. Hirsch (1972) has been the first to introduce the notion of gatekeepers to describe a tastemaking function that operates at the end of cultural production processes by evaluating the output of creative industries and promoting specific products to selected audiences. In this vein, publishers, critics or reviewers can be seen as cultural gatekeepers or mediators as they are involved in the mediation between the production of cultural goods and the production of consumer tastes (Bordieu, 1984). They constrain diversity by making available to the public only a small number of the works actually created, and determining what creations will become marketable products (Debenedetti, 2006; Hirsch, 1972). Distinguished critics such as Bridget Foley at *Women's Wear Daily*, Vanessa Friedman at the *Financial Times* and Cathy Horyn at *The New York Times* vet the new collections designers introduce each season, chiding those who fail to display sufficient originality as well as those who have gone too far. For example, Horyn dismissed Céline creative director Phoebe Philo's 2012 collection as '…a club sandwich of cleverly reworked ideas', while taking Dior designer Bill Gaytten to task for parading strange 'over-bright costumes' with 'dumb cubes and balls embedded in the models' hair' (Horyn, 2011a, 2011b).

Our research aims to better understand the actual impact critics' reviews have on designers and the work that they do in the fashion field or, put in a different way, to what extent they contribute to shaping stylistic dynamics, i.e. fashion change. By documenting a systematic correlation between fashion critics' reviews of specific designers' collections and the styles these designers subsequently introduce, we shed light on the role of one specific exogenous force in driving style dynamics.

In contrast to products for which innovation relies heavily on technological advancements, innovativeness in fashion focuses primarily on aesthetics. For cultural goods including fashion-oriented products, appearance is often the most strongly perceived contributor to value (Hirsch, 1972). The fashion industry depends on stylistic innovation, which occurs when novelty is conferred on a product in terms of its visual attributes (Alcaide Marzal & Esparza, 2007; Godart, Maddux, Shipilov, & Galinsky, 2015). Fashion designers create a new aesthetic by changing style elements that affect a garment's appearance, such as materials, proportion, colour, ornamentation, shape and size (Bloch, Brunel, & Arnold, 2003). With stylistic innovation, it is generally easier for a product to be perceived as 'highly innovative' (Garcia & Calantone, 2003), or significantly different from earlier iterations. With few technical boundaries, it is also easier for products to venture past the boundaries of what a market will accept. However, designers' freedom to innovate is not unbounded. It is bridled by what society, and the fashion *cognoscenti* in it, will or will not accept.

Our research documents the role gatekeepers play in the fashion industry by influencing how designers manage stylistic innovation. We rely on a large set of data related to the styles introduced by a sample of 48 Italian and French high-end womenswear brands that have systematically presented their collections in the Milan and Paris fashion shows over a ten-year-long timeframe: 1999–2008. Gatekeepers get a first look at the innovations of elite design houses each season when they attend fashion shows in fashion hubs around the world, such as Paris, Milan, London and New York. We select four relevant critics' outlets and closely analyze their response to stylistic changes presented by firms during the fashion shows. We propose that gatekeepers provide valuable feedback by informing designers whether the styles introduced each season are suitably original as opposed to too radical or too derivative. Designers may publicly take umbrage to these critiques, which explains why design houses retaliate against those who write unfavourable reviews. Carolina Herrera, Giorgio Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Helmut Lang, Nicole Miller and Oscar de la Renta have all reportedly attempted to ban *The New York Times* and its fashion gatekeeper, Cathy Horyn, from covering their collections at various times. In the end, however, our work reveals that designers heed gatekeepers' evaluations. More specifically, we show how designers move farther away from styles reviewed less favourably while adhering more closely to styles reviewed more positively, and how the styles a designer introduces in one season also depend on gatekeepers' assessments of competing designers' styles introduced in previous seasons. By showing how fashion gatekeepers help influence the styles designers produce, our study is an important step toward disentangling the complex exogenous forces that drive stylistic dynamics among elite designer brands in the fashion industry.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First, we review the relevant literature regarding style, style dynamics and firms' response to stylistic innovation introduced by competitors. Then we briefly summarize relevant work exploring the role of gatekeepers in creative industries. It is in this context that we present the three fundamental hypotheses that guided the development of our model and empirical analysis. In our empirical analyses, we describe the rich, real-world data that allow us to measure the extent to which individual design houses changed their styles year by year, and how these changes appear to be influenced by critics' reviews. We then present the results of our analyses and discuss our findings and their implications. We conclude by discussing some limitations of our work and opportunities for future research.

STYLE AND STYLISTIC DYNAMICS

What is fashionable is often defined by the prevalence of a particular style in the marketplace. Style itself can be defined formally as a characteristic or distinctive mode or method of expression, presentation or conception in the field of some art (Nystrom, 1928, p. 3), or 'the aesthetic and symbolic choice a company makes regarding the products and services, their main features, and how they are combined' (Cillo & Verona, 2008, p. 651). Davis (1992) argues that style is really

a code that is radically dissimilar from those used in cryptography because the signifiers are neither words nor phrases, and the codes seem to be constantly evolving. Style is also considered a fundamental driver of brand recognition, a mode of attention that identifies 'something by its kind (name) and in view of the use to which it could be put' (Krippendorff, 2005, p. 91). In other words, style corresponds to a design that can be used

> …to reflect corporate and brand values, to develop greater consistency over the product range, and to define the distinguishing attributes of brands and sub-brands in the company's brand portfolio (…) Design is but one of the media through which a company can communicate its core brand values. (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010, pp. 7–8)

Along with the other communication media, therefore, the design features represent the brand's identity. According to an increasing number of contributions in organizational research, design represents a strategic priority for companies (e.g. Ravasi & Rindova, 2008; Verganti, 2009). Design features themselves contribute to co-determining the meaning of the brand (Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005). Every product can indeed be seen as stating something through its design, intentionally or unintentionally (Giard, 1990; Oppenheimer, 2005). Qualitative brand descriptions are transformed into design features – which, in turn, generate the intended meaning of products (Krippendorff, 2005; Verganti, 2009; Vilnai-Yavetz & Refaeli, 2011). This occurs via a process of semantic enrichment that translates the core identity of the product into aesthetic features, helps explain the functionality of the product and excites users by triggering emotional reactions (Eisenman, 2013; Krippendorff, 2005). In a nutshell, style can be synthesized as 'a durable and recognizable pattern of aesthetic choices' (Godart, 2018, p. 106).

In the case of apparel, style is reflected in a combination of features or elements that distinguish specific garments from others, especially with respect to aesthetics (Eckman & Wagner, 1994). What is fashionable or 'in fashion' in a specific period depends on the distinctive stylistic elements that a large number of people wear at the same time. An innovation in fashion has to do with the process of changing styles and social codes, but this change can only exist if a specific social community embraces it (Cappetta, Cillo, & Ponti, 2006). Thus, a change in style can exist to the extent that it is communicated and reviewed by experts who influence the users' adoption behaviour.

Despite ongoing research in fashion across several disciplines, including consumer behaviour, marketing strategy, law, sociology and management science, we are not aware of any study that has examined how individual designers' or design houses' styles change from season to season. More importantly, this research documents how outside forces (i.e. experts) influence those who are responsible for stylistic innovation within fashion, i.e. designers.

Q2 Q3 Perhaps the best-known studies of how styles change over time are those by Alfred Kroeber (1919a, 1919b, 1940), an anthropologist who proposed a cyclical explanation for changes in fashion. Kroeber focused on proportions for women's evening dresses and measured six basic elements with respect to their form – which he referred to as style (skirt or dress length and width, waist length and width, and depth and width of the décolletage or cut out at the neck). His original

study spanned 76 years (1844–1919), and included a sampling of 10 dresses per year. Subsequent work (Richardson & Kroeber, 1940) expanded the period under study to 332 years (1605–1936). The authors plotted their measures of dress forms over time, smoothing out variations of their periodicity curve by estimating a five-year moving average. They concluded that the basic dimensions (e.g. silhouette) alternated with irregular cycles of about one century in duration for each dimension. It is worth pointing out that Kroeber's search for long-term cyclical variation in fashion ignored causality concerns.

More recent research has looked at the influence of societal events, such as war and peace and transitions in societal roles for women, on how fashion evolves over time. Weeden (1977), for example, adapted Kroeber's methodology to study women's daywear. She found skirt widths, skirt lengths, waist widths and waist lengths varied more from 1936 to 1976 than before 1936 and attributed the variance to periods of societal agitation including the Vietnam War. Cosbey, Damhorst, and Farrell-Beck (2003) posited that fashion changes as women's roles in society evolve. They analyzed women's daywear in the late ninteenth and early twentieth centuries using 252 illustrations from fashion magazines and found that heterogeneity in dress increased as women transitioned from domestic Victorian roles to less confined roles. Behling (1985) documented the effect of demographics on dress changes, particularly for women in the median age group of the population as they are more likely to serve as fashion role models for others.

In short, patterns in stylistic change in fashion have been documented through time and found to be sensitive to societal events. More pertinent to our work, Lowe and Lowe (1982) reexamined Richardson and Kroeber's original data using time series analysis and systems theory, concluding that the long-term periodicities Kroeber found were, to a large extent, statistically significant. However, they went a step further. Based on their statistical analysis, these authors defined which factors were associated with the predictable (structural) and unpredictable (random) portions of the long-term periodicities. The structural aspects created a subtle force that resulted in a slow and continuous stylistic change, which they referred to as inertia. Countering the force of inertia was a damping factor that resisted slow and steady change, which they referred to as cultural continuity. While Kroeber saw changes in fashion as the product of some yet undefined complex social force 'on a scale not without a certain grandeur' (1919a, 1919b, p. 258), Lowe and Lowe believed that individuals could influence the long-term fashion cycle. They concluded that the random, previously unaccountable variations in the long-term cycles that Kroeber found, reflected the influence of 'individual innovation and initiative' (1982, p. 540). Q4

In other words, individual designers and/or design houses contribute to affecting the evolution of fashion in the long run through the changes they instigate in the short run. This perspective is consistent with a view that designers and design houses propose new styles that may ultimately shape the market. Each season, designers attempt to distinguish themselves from both what they did in the past and other designers by introducing new styles. Sproles (1981) suggested that the constant introduction of new styles is the lifeblood of the fashion industry. Indeed,

> …style enables fashion; without style, there is no fashion. To understand fashion, one has to understand style, because in essence fashion is about the diffusion of styles rather than the diffusion of clothes. (Godart, 2018, p. 112)

Gregory (1947) explored the rate of introduction of new styles into the marketplace and concluded that the industry accommodates too much change. He argued that the industry as a whole intentionally shortened the life of its products by destroying their psychological utility. This is done by replacing existing styles with new styles each season. Gregory dubbed this hastened turnover 'purposeful obsolescence'. In an era of high concern for sustainability and environmental consciousness, this might clearly represent an issue that deserves further attention.

Fashion observers argue that the short-run stylistic changes tend to display attributes that differ only incrementally from earlier styles. We test the notion of incremental change in style at the level of the individual designer. If styles proceed incrementally in the short run, we would expect the amount of time between two seasons to be negatively correlated with the similarity in styles; conversely, the longer the gap between them, the more different styles will be, on average. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1. Style evolves over time such that the difference in style between two points in time (seasons) increases as the amount of time between these two time periods increases.

Evidence in support of *H1* would suggest that while designers feel the need to change their styles significantly from season to season, they tend to stay closer to what the market saw recently, but farther away from what the market saw in a more distant past. Typically, these changes are expected to progress in one direction (e.g. skirts getting shorter) until a point of excess or an extreme, after which styles start to cycle back (Robinson, 1958a, 1958b). As Simmel (1904) and Kroeber (1919a, 1919b) argued, style change is a non-linear phenomenon and, therefore, it is possible to observe comebacks or retro styles that the designers revamp and launch again onto the market after several years. Hypothesis 1 does not specify the direction of a trend, nor does it characterize it with regard to proportion or other particular style element (e.g. skirt lengths, the use of fur and so on). Instead, it says only that style characteristics associated with a designer's collection tend to change to a greater extent as time goes by. In other words, a designer's collection in a specific season looks less like a collection of previous seasons, particularly the longer the lag between different seasons. Finding support for *H1* would afford a more nuanced understanding of how designers should balance novelty and continuity, introducing new styles each year while changing their overall look gradually over time.

Q5

CRITICS AS GATEKEEPERS IN THE DIFFUSION OF STYLE

A large amount of research on fashion revolves around how new styles, once introduced, diffuse through a population (Crane, 1999; Davis, 1992; Field, 1970;

King, 1963; Miller, McIntyre, & Mantrala, 1993; Simmel, 1904; Sproles, 1981). Many researchers have emphasized how people purchase fashion goods because they convey status and distinction to the individual (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Coelho & McClure, 1993; Frijters, 1998; Veblen, 1894, 1899). The classical top-down model is exemplified by Simmel's ([1904]1957) 'trickle down' theory whereby styles flow downward from elites to the working classes. Economists have developed a variety of models to explain fashion diffusion that are built upon assumptions of status acquisition. For example, Pesendorfer (1995, 2004) developed a theoretical model based on two key concepts. First, fashion items serve as a signaling device to establish social status and have no intrinsic value otherwise. For him, status is unobservable without the benefit of dress. Second, fashion items have a finite lifetime and need to be replaced cyclically. This occurs as follows: high types in the upper social strata (indicated by wealth, family or education) use fashion to identify other high types and avoid low types. Low-type consumers adopt the products selected by upper social strata, thus causing status signal degradation (eroding the 'snob effect' à la Leibenstein, 1950). High types then need new styles, the sort of planned obsolescence Gregory (1947) described, initiating a new fashion cycle.

An alternative to the trickle-down model is a bottom-up model whereby styles emerge from subcultures that possess distinctive styles that attract attention and imitation from different groups (Polhemus, 1994). In the 'status float' or trickle-up model (Field, 1970), innovators generally emerge among blue-collar workers and ethnic groups in urban areas that are hotbeds for other types of innovation such as music and art. Other theorists have described the fashion process as a form of collective behaviour taking place at all societal levels (King, 1963), with fashion trends being the result of 'a convergence and marshaling of collective taste' (Blumer, 1969, p. 283). Trickle-down, trickle-up and collective selection models that attempt to describe where new styles come from.

In our conceptual model, which focuses on high-end fashion, designers are still a major endogenous force of change (Kaufman, 2004) as they are responsible for innovating and introducing new styles into the fashion industry. Consider Vivienne Westwood. She took the Johnny Rotten/Sex Pistols look (clothing that appears dirty, ripped, etc.) to the catwalk, creating a collection that drew from the do-it-yourself attitude of punk styling of the mid-1970s and turned it into high fashion. From there it gained widespread popularity and derivative styles spread throughout mainstream fashion. For our purposes, it does not matter where the inspiration comes from. Our goal is to document the role of system selection in determining which of the stylistic innovations launched by designers every season will endure and hence shape the long-term fashion cycle. System selection theory introduces three ideal types of exogenous information sources that consumers rely on when making their product choices: market, expert and peer selection (e.g. Wijnberg, 2004; Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000; Zuckerman & Tai-Young, 2003). We focus on the specific role of experts to show their contribution in determining the styles designers stick with and those they abandon.

Q6

This approach is consistent with the vision of art from Becker (1982), who argues that art works are not the creation of isolated individuals but result from

cooperation between different artists, suppliers of materials, art distributors, critics and audiences, who together make up the art world. Cultural mediators add symbolic value to culture, acting as tastemakers (Lynes, 1954). They play a central role in contexts characterized by turbulence, a huge supply of cultural offerings, uncertainty on the demand side and a lack of unequivocal quality standards (Janssen & Verboord, 2015). Griswold (1987) has highlighted how mediators in the literary field 'fabricate' cultural meaning while, more broadly, Zuckerman and Tai-Young (2003) have shown how they impact audience perceptions and market success.

The effect of gatekeepers on consumers has been documented by researchers specifically examining creative industries such as literature (Caves, 2000; Greco, 1997), film and television (Austin, 1984; Basuroy, Chatterjee, & Ravid, 2003; Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997; Holbrook, 1999; Jourdan, Durand, & Thornton, 2017; West & Broniarczyk, 1998), and food (Shaw, 2000). In their article about the role of critics in enabling producers and consumers to mutually agree about the terms of trade in the US wine industry, Hsu, Roberts, and Swaminathan (2012, p. 83) point emphasize how

> …the influence of critics is particularly strong in markets for restaurant meals, movies, books, and wine, where one cannot know the quality of a good until it has been purchased and consumed.

Most of the work we are aware of has focused on the role of gatekeepers in the film business. Research on the influence of movie critics, for instance, has found a positive correlation between positive reviews and a film's box office performance (Litman, 1983; Litman & Ahn, 1998; Litman & Kohl, 1989; Sochay, 1994; Wallace, Seigerman, & Holbrook, 1993). Basuroy et al. (2003) argued that this is the case because gatekeepers are both influencers (opinion leaders other people follow) and predictors (foreseeing what people will do).

Critics play also an important role in creating designers' reputation. There is a relevant literature that has examined how mediators or gatekeepers shape artistic careers or reputations (Godart, 2012; Janssen & Verboord, 2015). The outcomes of their evaluation process affect not only the reputation of cultural producers and their products but also their symbolic capital, i.e. status and authority in the field. They play a fundamental role in reducing uncertainty in the market and enabling cultural 'consecration' – whereby a few artists and works are identified and set apart from others in their field as exceptionally valuable and high status (Cattani, Ferriani, & Allison, 2014; Janssen & Verboord, 2015).

In this chapter, we focus on the impact of critics on firms' style changes. It is important to point out that we are not interested in documenting the downstream effects, or how gatekeepers' reviews might influence consumers. Instead, we examine how reviews that fashion critics write immediately after fashion shows influence designers and design houses more directly – that is, how the exogenous influence of gatekeepers contributes to defining fashion trends and set stylistic dynamics. In this respect, different studies in organizational sociology have analyzed the impact of critics' evaluation on organizational behaviour (e.g. Durand, Rao, & Monin, 2007). More specifically, when we refer to stylistic

innovation peers, gatekeepers, and customers play a very important role in making judgements (Cattani et al., 2014). Indeed, innovation that has to do with the process of renewing social codes and styles does not exist unless it is embraced by a specific social community (Cappetta et al., 2006; Godart, 2018). As already mentioned, such an innovation exists to the extent that it is communicated and reviewed by experts who influence the users' adoption behaviour. Originality must be dispensed in just the right dose. Gatekeepers play a key role in deciding the appropriate amount of change. Although Godart et al. (2015) have shown the existence of a strong correlation between fashion critics' evaluation and buyers' evaluation – which represents the best available proxy for the commercial success of a fashion collection – it is difficult to argue that the influence of gatekeepers on designers is the result of gatekeepers influencing consumers and, by implication, sales. Consider spring fashion wear, for example. It is during fashion shows, in September and October, that designers unveil their Spring collections, that will be sold the following May and June. Store buyers have already placed at least partial orders, if not their entire orders, before ever attending a designer's show (Donnally, 1998). What consumers ultimately buy will not be known until several months after the shows when those styles hit the sales racks. In the meantime, designers need to design their collections for the following season. Reviews on the current season's catwalks are published immediately after the fashion shows, so they will influence the subsequent season's style as designers need to incorporate this feedback before knowing how the market reacts.

If fashion designers abide by their artistic instincts and ignore critics' reviews, the relationship between new styles and reviews should be weak to nonexistent. We propose that the opposite is true and that fashion gatekeepers influence styles, which motivates our second hypothesis:

H2. Designers explore more (i.e. change styles) to move farther away from the design houses' past styles that were reviewed more negatively.

Hypothesis 2 states that designers will differentiate their collections as much as possible from those styles critics liked the least. Of course, if Hypothesis 2 is true, the inverse must be true as well: designers will stick more closely to designs that critics reviewed more positively. This would lead to greater similarity between their new styles and styles that were well received. With our data, we cannot tell whether designers are striving to move away from poorly received styles or stick closer to styles that were well received, or both. But the overall pattern of results would be the same: the elements of a season's basic styles would change more – i.e. designers would explore more – the more gatekeepers frowned upon them.

REACTIVITY AND PEER INFLUENCE IN STYLISTIC INNOVATION

This chapter intends to document an interdependency among elite designers that reveals how designers are attuned to what gatekeepers have to say when they evaluate other competing designers' and design houses' styles. If designers do in

fact pay attention to gatekeepers, they should not only respond to the relative critical success and failure in terms of their own designs but also in terms of how gatekeepers judged their peers. This idea of different external triggers interplaying together in shaping the change routes pursued by individual organizations (in our case designers) is consistent with the theory about organizational response to different public measures of performance, such as official industry rankings. According to Sauder and Espeland (2009), organizational members' capacity to internalize external pressures determines the relative tightness of the links between institutional pressures (in our case, gatekeepers' reviews) and organizational activities (in our case, style change). As opposed to being solely inward focused, designers would be outward focused, and attend to the successes and failures of other designers. Following this reasoning, we thus hypothesize:

H3. Designers change styles to move further away from other designers' past styles that were reviewed more negatively.

Hypothesis 3 is a strong test of how responsive designers are to critical feedback. Evidence in support of hypothesis 3 would suggest that designers are consciously attending to the successes and failures of others when considering what styles to develop in the future. Support for both hypotheses 2 and 3 would contradict the idea that fashion designers ignore gatekeepers by unilaterally deciding what styles to introduce and what people should wear.

METHOD

We select the high-end fashion field as the elective context to study style dynamics. This is an ideal context to understand the role played by the impact of gatekeepers on style dynamics. We focus on 38 high-end fashion brands systematically organizing their catwalks during Milan and Paris Fashion Weeks. Our data collection occurred in multiple stages. First, we sought to gather information on how designers changed their styles from year to year spanning almost a decade from 1999 to 2007. A summary of the changes is our dependent variable. We chose to look at the behaviour of high-end fashion houses in Europe, specifically France and Italy, because European designers are widely known for espousing creative intentions that shun commercialism. While New York and London complete the list of the 'big four' fashion capitals of the world, our data collection was also guided by practical concerns. Therefore, we chose Paris and Milan for their long-standing history as centres of art and fashion, and because they are home to a sufficient sample of highly prestigious and powerful fashion houses and the conglomerates that own them (e.g. Louis Vuitton-Moët Hennessy, Pinault-Printemps-Redoute (PPR), Compagnie Financière Richemont, the Aeffe Group, the Prada Group).

Fashion Weeks are semi-annual events where designers preview the following season's latest innovations in style for the fashion press. Clothes introduced to the market are reflections of the styles displayed on the catwalk. We obtained a list of all the brands that were included in the catwalk calendars of the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana in Milan from 1999 to 2007 (fall/winter and

spring/summer). This nonprofit association coordinates the development of Italian fashion through shows and events such as the Women's Prêt-à-porter Collections in March and October. We did the same for the Fedération Française de la Couture et du Prêt-à-porter, the industry's governing body in Paris. Only those companies that put on runway shows with their seasonal collections during fashion week for at least five out of the nine focal years were included. This resulted in 38 companies, with 22 located in Milan and 16 in Paris (see Table 1).

We created variables indicating whether the firm was French or Italian (Country), how many years the firm reported being in existence (Age), whether a design house reported relying on a single designer or a team of designers (Type_designer), and the number of employees each company reported each year (Employees) – which served as a proxy for firm size. The average number of employees working for a design house in our sample was 286, while the median was 185. Summary statistics for these measures are reported in Table 2. For each company, we also collected data on when designers or design teams were reported to have changed. Designers had been retained for about 95% of the shows in our sample.

Table 1. Fashion Houses in Paris and Milan (Sponsoring at Least Five Catwalks from 1999 to 2007).

French Brands	#Ads	Italian Brands	#Ads
1. Balenciaga	40	1. Alberta Ferretti	197
2. Celine	55	2. Blumarine	379
3. Chanel	90	3. Clips	50
4. Chloé	106	4. Dolce & Gabbana	778
5. Christian Dior	90	5. Etro	117
6. Givenchy	43	6. Fendi	171
7. Hermes	51	7. Gianfranco Ferre	179
8. Jean Paul Gautier	50	8. Gucci	208
9. Kenzo	34	9. Iceberg	100
10. Lagerfeld	33	10. Jil Sander	135
11. Lanvin	43	11. La Perla	91
12. Louis Vuitton	83	12. Mariella Burani	97
13. Sonia Rykiel	35	13. Missoni	139
14. Ungaro	18	14. Miu Miu	195
15. Vivienne Westwood	13	15. Moschino	213
16. Yves Saint Laurent	96	16. Philosophy	118
		17. Prada	296
		18. Roberto Cavalli	343
		19. Rocco Barocco	132
		20. SportMax	142
		21. Valentino	106
		22. Versace	254

Table 2. Summary Statistics of Independent Variables.

Variable	*N*	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Country	684	1.58	0.49	1 (France)	2 (Italy)
Season	684	1.50	0.50	1 (Fall Winter)	2 (Spring Summer)
Type of Designer	640	0.41	0.49	0 (Single)	1 (Team)
Designer Change	638	0.95	0.22	0 (Fired)	1 (Retained)
Age of Firm	640	35.61	22.80	1	118
Employees	500	286.04	343.63	4	2,415
Review Meanrating	629	3.49	0.77	1	5
*N*_reviews	684	2.89	1.04	1	4

Distance: The Degree to Which Styles Change

To measure the extent to which each designer's style changed from year to year, we compared prototypical pieces that were offered commercially after each show. How we did this warrants elaboration. Runway shows for Spring/Summer collections occur in September and October. These are followed by advertisements for these collections the following February and March (the next calendar year), with the actual products typically going on sale in April and May. Runway shows for Fall/Winter collections take place in February and March, then followed by advertisements in September and October with products going on sale simultaneously. According to the fashion industry experts we talked to, advertisements during these key periods (February and March for the Spring collection, September and October for the Fall collection) are indicative of the styles designers created for that season. The photographs for these advertisements are usually shot immediately after the catwalks. We collected a sample of each design house's advertisements for each year to assess the change in style for a specific designer or design team. Appendix reports a timeline of the product flow from catwalks to stores, including the sample of selected advertisements.

Like other papers (see, for example, Van der Laan & Kuipers, 2016), we analyze the pictures of the advertising campaigns proposed by the fashion companies in our sample. The rationale for using such images is that in their print advertising campaigns fashion firms tend to present the items that are more representative of the stylistic innovation they aim to propose.

The sources for our advertisements were *Vogue Italia*, *Vogue France*, *Elle Italia* and *Marie Claire France* (examples are reported in Appendix). After consulting with industry experts, we chose these four magazines because they are considered the most legitimate sources for diffusing what designers present on the runways. *Vogue Italia* and *Vogue France* target a more professional and sophisticated audience, whereas *Elle* and *Marie Claire* target the trendy consumer market. All four magazines have monthly editions. Industry experts recommended not using *Elle France* because it is published weekly, and its positioning is somewhat different. We collected every advertisement published in these magazines for the 38 design houses in our sample. Our data included style metrics gathered from 5,343 advertisements.

Following Cappetta et al. (2006), we focused on 11 primary types of garments (e.g. dresses, pants and so on). Judges coded each garment on the eight or nine out of the 13 style elements that were appropriate for the particular type of apparel (see Tables 3 and 4). For example, tops were evaluated on sleeve length while pants were not. Six elements were evaluated using continuous measures (e.g. sleeve length, neckline), while seven elements consisted of multiple discrete measures (e.g. colour, fabric). We coded the discrete style elements (e.g. colour) using dichotomous variables (1 if it was white, else 0; 1 if it was neutral, else 0). The same garment can score 1 on more than one colour and on more than one fabric (materials, applications and processing) of the pattern and the sleeve (cut and design). This means that a single piece of garment can be classified as black and metallic, and as having embroidery and feathers. We classified them as discrete style elements because they are 'on/off' variables, though they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, if three out of five advertisements included white, the score for white was 0.6, while the average neckline was simply the average on that measure (deep to sculpture coded as 1–7) for that designer in that particular year. For any designer, the final design code (scores on these 61 measures) was the average across all the advertisements we collected for that season. Taken together, this created what we call the *style genome* for each of the 38 designers for each of the 18 seasons in our sample.

Table 3. Elements of the *Style Genome*: Continuous Variable Coding (By Garment Type).

Garment	Type of Fit	Waistline	Neckline	Sleeve	Top	Bottom
Top	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long	v. short to long	
Shirt	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long		short to v. long
Peacoat	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long		short to v. long
Sweater	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long	v. short to long	
Skirt	slim to oversize	low to high				short to v. long
Dress	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long		short to v. long
Jacket	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long		short to v. long
Coat	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long		short to v. long
Trench	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long		short to v. long
Pants	slim to oversize	low to high				short to v. long
Bluson	slim to oversize		deep to turtleneck	strapless to long		short to v. long

Table 4. Elements of the *Style Genome*: Discrete Variable Coding (For All Garments).

Color	Fabric (Material)	Fabric (Application)	Fabric (Processing)	Pattern	Sleeve (Cut)	Sleeve (Design)
White	Cotton	Feathers	Knitwear	Stripes	Empire	Wide
Neutral	Linen	Bejeweled	Wrinkled	Plaid	Trapeze	One-strap
Pastel	Silk	Fringe	Ripped	Floral	Drape	Bat
Bright	Wool	Flowers	Pleated	Graphics		
Dark	Denim	Fur	Decorated	Animal		
Black	Leather	Pockets		Camouflage		
Bi-color	Sequin	Embroidery		Polka Dots		
Fluorescent	Lace			Optical		
Multi-color	Chiffon			Patchwork		
Metallic	Synthetic			Paisley		
	Lamè			Shades		
	Jersey			Tweed		
	Fur					
	Brocade					
	Velvet					

We label the difference between any two style genomes (over time but either within or across designers) as the *style distance*. A style distance measure reflects the relative change in styles and was constructed by calculating the Euclidean distance in a 61-dimensional space, based on the 61 style measures using the 13 style elements for the 11 garment types. The Euclidean distance accommodates variables that are measured on different scales and provides a singular number reflecting the magnitude of difference between the styles. The distinct style elements display a fair amount of independence, the median Pearson correlation coefficient equal to −0.015, and 98% falling between −0.20 and 0.20. Our style distance measure captures the magnitude of stylistic changes over time, but is always calculated within season (Fall/Winter or Spring/Summer).

Style distance serves as our dependent measure because our focus is on whether, and to what extent, styles might change in response to critical feedback. Our data allowed us to calculate 2,530 unique style distance measures: this falls short of the expected number because not all 38 designers placed advertisements every season in every year on the magazines in our sample. The average style distance across all designers for any two years in our sample was 2.87, with a range of 0.79–7.98.

Critics' Reviews

Our focal independent variable is how critics reviewed the styles presented on the catwalk by a designer or design house each season. To this end, we collected

critical reviews of the catwalk shows for each season (Spring/Summer, Fall/Winter) for each year in the sample (1999–2007). We drew on published reviews in international magazines and newspapers after the biannual fashion week shows in Paris and Milan. With the help of three industry experts, we selected four different international news sources that are considered the most influential among buyers and consumers based on their opinions on the styles introduced on the catwalks. These sources are the *International Herald Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *WWD* (Women's Wear Daily) and *Style.com*, Vogue's official website.

After gathering all of the articles that addressed the catwalk shows, we collected 1,814 individual reviews (μ = 2.65 per show). The reviews reflected coverage of 92% of the shows (629 out of 684). Two independent judges rated each review on a 5-point scale (1 = negative to 5 = positive). We then created an average review score (review_meanrating) for each of the 38 design houses for each season for the nine years of data in our sample. The average review formed a proxy for critical assessments of the styles introduced that year.

To test whether fashion houses pay attention to reviews and the weight of these reviews' impact, we ran a logistic regression using our data on when designers or design teams were reported to have changed as the dependent variable, and review_meanrating as the focal independent variable. We included a dummy variable indicating whether the fashion house relied on a single designer or design team (type_designer), and their interaction (review_-me*type_desig). The results are reported in Table 5. The critics' reviews (review_meanrating) have a significant effect on whether the design house changed their designer or design team: an increase in the reviewers' mean rating corresponds to a lower likelihood of change. Neither the type of designer nor the interaction has a statistically significant effect. Thus, we have preliminary evidence suggesting that critics' reviews are attended to and have an impact on design houses. This also suggests designers should be concerned with what the critics are saying about their work.

Table 5. Average Style Distance as a Function of Year Span.

Yearspan	*N*	Average	Min	Max
1	543	2.7624	0.9663	6.8784
2	476	2.7609	0.7954	7.0985
3	407	2.8058	0.8872	7.9373
4	342	2.8156	0.8844	6.5596
5	282	2.9946	1.0436	6.5574
6	215	2.9465	1.1505	6.8475
7	150	3.0878	1.2693	6.6437
8	85	3.4764	1.6867	6.4420
9	30	3.8406	2.1213	6.8557

RESULTS

Style Progression across Time

The average style distance across two consecutive years is 2.76, while across non-consecutive years is 2.9, up to 3.84. These distances suggest that, over the study period, as the amount of time increased, the magnitude of the difference in styles grew. The relationship between time and a change in style is evident when looking at Table 6. These results are consistent with the notion that styles evolve slowly over time (incremental innovation), becoming increasingly different from what they used to in the past, consistent with and in support of *H1*.

The Impact of Critical Feedback on Style

In order to test the effect of critical feedback on the styles that designers introduce, we ran a regression using GLM in SAS with the style distance measures between two seasons for individual designers as the dependent measure, and the reviewers' critical assessment (review_meanrating) for the earlier of the two years as the focal independent measure. We included the number of years between two styles (Yearspan) to control for the amount of time before the two styles being compared hit the market. We also included several other control variables such as the number of employees (Employees), whether the season was fall/winter or spring/summer (Season), whether the design house was based in France or Italy (Country), and whether the fashion house was led by a single designer or a design team (Type_designer). The relevant interactions were also included. The results are summarized in Table 7.

First, in further support of *H1*, the estimate for Yearspan was positive and significant (0.044, $p < 0.01$): the more years between two seasons for a designer, the greater the difference in styles. Empirically, we have evidence of styles becoming more distinct from past styles as time goes by. This trend means that we do not see a strong indication of nostalgia (i.e. returning to what a designer has done in the past in terms of multiple style elements), at least during the study period (i.e. less than 10 years). If, in fact, some designers did revert back to earlier designs, other designers must have moved farther away from them for this result to hold.

In support of *H2*, we observe a tendency for designers to abandon styles that were reviewed less favourably in the past season. The coefficient for critical

Table 6. Logistic Regression of Review Meanrating on Designer's (or Design Team) Change ($N = 525$).

Variables	DF	Estimate	Std. Dev.	Wald Chi-Square	Pr > ChiSq
Intercept	1	−1.1682	0.4941	1.8351	0.1755
Review Meanrating	1	−0.5280	0.5004	4.0997	0.0429
Type of designer	1	−0.8926	0.8624	1.0712	0.3007
Review Meanrating*type of designer	1	0.2821	0.2608	1.1700	0.2794

Table 7. Within Designer Regression of Review Meanrating on Individual Designer's Style Distance between Two Seasons.

Variables	Coef.	*F*-Value	Pr > *F*
Intercept	2.7335		
Yearspan	0.0440	10.17	0.002
Season (Fall Winter)	−0.4359	2.75	0.10
Country (France)	0.8446	5.60	0.02
Review Meanrating	−0.0942	12.20	0.001
Review Meanrating*Country (France)	0.0247	0.06	0.81
Employees	−0.0014	10.75	0.001
Review Meanrating*Employees	0.0005	13.40	0.001
Type of designer (Single)	0.7622	4.23	0.04
Review Meanrating*Type of designer (Single)	−0.2091	3.87	0.05

reviews (Review_meanrating) is negative and significant (-0.094, $p < 0.01$). This result suggests how designers, intentionally or unintentionally, stick closer to styles that were well received in the past and avoid those that were not. This is the first empirical demonstration that, while designers distance themselves from previous styles over time, exactly how far they move is moderated by critic's reviews of their work (how fashion critics responded to specific styles in the past). This result dispels the long-held myth of the designer as dictator unfettered by outside criticism of his or her own creations.

As to the other variables in our model, a number of interesting findings emerge that were not predicted but shed light on the high-end fashion industry. On average, designers from French firms changed their styles to a greater degree year by year than designers from Italian firms. This result suggests that French designers were relatively more innovative, while Italian designers were more conservative. Since Paris remains the centre of the modern fashion world (Rocamora, 2006), the willingness to try something new may be partly the reason for, and partly the result of, the French hegemony.

We also observe that larger companies (Employees) changed their styles to a lesser extent than smaller firms. It may be that smaller firms believe they need to introduce more radical stylistic changes to make a statement and garner attention away from their larger and better-known competitors; or, it may be that the larger, more iconic fashion houses possess a specific aesthetic to which they need to adhere to more closely (i.e. more continuity). Of course, both could be occurring simultaneously. Consistent with this idea, the interaction between Employees and Review_meanrating was positive and significant suggesting that big companies are less sensitive to reviews – i.e. they distanced themselves less from styles that received negative reviews. This result may be because larger companies are less likely to learn from critical feedback or because they believe that despite the reviews, their styles shape the market (i.e. they possess more power). It is possible that bigger design houses consider themselves

responsible for creating fashion, and thus criticism of larger firms does not carry the same weight. In other words, these designers are the creative progenitors and critics will eventually see the light. Finally, we observe firms with single designers (Type_designer) introduce styles that differ more from year to year, on average, but they are also more sensitive to criticism (Review_meanrating*Type_designer). This suggests that firms with a creative lead or single designer are more daring but also are more likely to move away from those styles that do not sit well with reviewers.

To test the effect of critics' response to competitors' styles on the degree to which designers change their styles (*H3*), we ran a regression with a much broader set of style distance measures. We utilized style distances by comparing every designer's collection for a particular season and year to all other designers' styles in prior years for that particular season. For example, as we hypothesized in *H3*, the distance between Givenchy's styles in 2003 and Chanel's styles in 2002 would depend on how Chanel's styles were received in 2002 by reviewers. Indeed, it may well be that certain companies are ahead of others in introducing a specific style that is then followed by other companies in the same league in subsequent years. A good example in this respect is the recent introduction of the street style by a company like Gucci. The reason why Gucci has introduced some street-style pieces in its collections ahead of other companies is that the new style brought by the new designer Alessandro Michele was closer to this type of aesthetics than other brands. This is one of the reasons that might explain why brands within the same league can introduce a new style with a different time pace. We, therefore, included two measures of firm size, one for the design house introducing the style, also called focal firm, (Employees2, or Givenchy in this example) and one for the size of the firm upon which the reviews were previously published (Employees1, or Chanel). We also included the same control variables as in our prior model as well as all the relevant interactions. Thus, our regression included more distance measures as we compared across designers, and as styles were presumed to depend on what other designers did and how the market responded. The results are summarized in Table 8.

First and foremost, in support of Hypothesis 3, we observe a tendency for designers to move away from styles introduced by other designers that were reviewed less favourably in the past. The coefficient for critical reviews (Review_meanrating) is negative and significant (-1.41, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that designers not only attend to how critics respond to the designs they introduced previously, but they are keenly aware of, and respond to, what critics say about other designers' styles. Taken together, these results provide the first empirical evidence that styles evolve based on creative forces across the industry, documenting the dynamic interaction between fashion houses and fashion critics in a recurring feedback loop.

Other results also emerge that add depth and shed further light on how the industry views critical feedback. The coefficient pertaining to the size of the design house introducing the style (Employees2) was not significant. This suggests there is no difference between big firms and small firms with respect to the degree to which they 'listen to' or attend to what critics had to say about other design

Table 8. Across Designers Regression of Other Designers' Reviews on Individual Designer's Style Distance between Two Seasons.

Variables	Coef.	*F*-Value	Pr > *F*
Intercept	3.1960		
Yearspan	0.0041	1.80	0.18
Season (Fall Winter)	−0.5673	112.97	<0.0001
Review Meanrating	−0.1410	44.67	<0.0001
Review Meanrating*Season (Fall Winter)	0.1049	48.92	<0.0001
France	0.5129	53.53	<0.0001
Review Meanrating*France	0.0378	3.47	0.06
Employees1 (size of the firm who got reviewed)	−0.0007	53.78	<0.0001
Review Meanrating*Employees1	0.0002	87.62	<0.0001
Type of designer1 (Single Designer of the firm who got reviewed)	−0.0338	0.22	0.64
Review Meanrating*Type of designer1 (Single)	−0.0368	3.12	0.08
France	0.2852	18.91	<0.0001
Review Meanrating*France	0.0211	1.32	0.25
Employees2 (size of the focal firm)	−0.00001	0.03	0.86
Review Meanrating*Employees2	−0.000003	0.03	0.85
Type of designer2 (Single Designer of the focal firm)	0.1521	5.00	0.03
Review Meanrating*Type of designer2 (Single)	−0.0146	0.58	0.45

houses in the previous year. Given design houses pay attention to how critics assess competitors' designs, it is interesting to note that larger design houses are not inherently less attentive to this information than smaller design houses. Both seem to learn something from what critics have to say and change their styles accordingly.

We do observe, however, a significant coefficient for the size of the design house upon which the previous review was based (Employees1). The coefficient for Employees1 is negative as is the interaction with mean rating. These results suggest that while designers at both small and big design houses attend to what critics have to say about other firms, they do not stay as far away from negative reviews of large design houses as much as they do negative reviews of small design houses. In short, a negative review of large design houses is less impactful on what others do.

We also observe design houses are less likely to avoid styles introduced by other design houses with a single designer (Type_designer1). The interaction between the type of designer and the average rating suggests that designers are also less inclined to distance themselves from design houses with a single designer when the latter's styles are reviewed less favourably. This may suggest that design houses with single designers rely on icons, like Karl Lagerfeld, and criticism of such icons is immaterial. But this is speculative. Across designers,

we also find larger style changes in Spring/Summer than Winter/Fall (Season) and among French than Italian design houses (Country). These latter results are consistent with those obtained when we compared style changes within designers (i.e. looked only at distances calculated between the styles of a single design house).

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The bulk of the literature on innovation has been in technology-driven contexts. In these contexts, the degree to which a change is radical or incremental can be assessed according to predictable models (Abernathy & Utterback, 1978). Technological innovation, by focusing on the physical and more tangible features of the product and its functionality, exists to some extent separately from stylistic innovation. For apparel, its value is often derived by what the style, or the brand or the brand's style says about the wearer. As a result, stating what is truly new is by far more difficult to determine. Hence, evaluating how and how much innovation has occurred when designers introduce new styles has become the role of fashion critics, whose expertise allows them to view a specific designer's work within the context of what they did before, what other designers have done and a general sense of the history of fashion. Our data and results suggest that fashion designers, as commercial artists, are sensitive to their past successes and failures when deciding what new designs to introduce. They also consider competitors' past work and how those styles have fared among critics. Our study reveals how designers consciously attend to what critics are saying about various styles introduced by competing design houses each season.

Yet the idea of considering critical evaluations when making creative decisions is often seen as anathema by those engaged in artistic pursuits. When creative personnel work in the area of stylistic innovation, listening to the desires of outsiders can prove flawed or even fatal. Consider the famous work by Komar and Melamid (1997), who attempted to discover what a painting should look like by surveying the public. The results were paintings that no one person would want, raising the question of whether artists, or even art critics, who know a lot about art, are better equipped at determining what types of paintings are visually appealing. These authors worked with composer David Soldier to illustrate the same effect for music. In a similar vein, Salganik, Dodds, and Watts (2006) dug more deeply into the paradox of unpredictability of a song's success by conducting an experimental study. Whether appreciated by critic and audiences, certain artists like to believe that they set the style and eventually the market will catch on. But clearly not everything they do will catch on. Our work explores the iterative changes in an artistic endeavour based on critics' evaluations, and our results suggest that fashion designers hedge by listening to feedback from certain experts.

We offer empirical evidence of a correlation between critical feedback and change in style of innovation. It would be interesting if the same type of tests

could be generalized to other industries where symbolic or aesthetic innovation is relevant, such as music and art. For example, one could explore whether a band's new songs tend to sound more like songs that were critical successes previously, or whether artists veer toward works that are well received by art critics. The idea of watching what works is well known in Hollywood, where movies that benefit from market feedback in other categories (e.g. adaptation of books, sequels, advanced screenings) are known to enjoy box office success while movies created based on the director's creative vision alone (auteur theory) are frequently dismal failures. Exploring if and how critics affect movies that are green lit would be a fascinating undertaking. One could track movies to determine whether studios over time copy elements of movies that critics praise and avoid things critics do not like. It would be interesting to test whether critics have any effect on what studios do over time.

Our findings contribute to the literature on fashion in multiple ways. First, we demonstrate how styles evolve for individual design houses (designers and design teams), progressing farther away from what has been done in the past as time progresses. This progression occurs, at least in the short run (nine years). There has been a relative dearth of studies of style changes over the past 50 years, and studies focusing on changes for individual brands are conspicuously absent in the literature. We find nine years is too short a time to observe fashion cycles of any significance, at least in high-end fashion. And we show that the designer as the dictator of fashion innovation just does not hold true, at least not in a strict sense. It is critical to reiterate that while many fashion theorists have argued that different models of fashion innovation and diffusion are based on anecdotal evidence, they are referring to the substance of those styles that eventually find their way onto the catwalk. While we do not claim to know or show where designers get their inspiration, our work reveals how designers are sensitive to critical evaluation and this affects style evolution; their styles stay closer to what has been praised and farther from what has not.

Managers in creative industries should take note of how designers integrate critical feedback and how stylistic innovation occurs incrementally based on what elite fashion writers are willing to accept. In industries where technological innovation drives new product introductions and functional requirements matter most, whether there is incremental or disruptive change may depend on the firm's capabilities. In fashion, change can be implemented much more easily, as there are fewer operational constraints. Yet how critics respond is what gives impetus to or impedes how much innovation is actually done.

Our work has its limitations. In our model, a designer's style, while based on 61 measures, did not include all possible style variables such as those pertaining to specific colours or some aspects of silhouettes favoured by designers. A more comprehensive measure is certainly still possible. Yet we believe our measure is detailed enough to provide a robust assessment of the extent to which styles change over time and to provide a meaningful indicator of the magnitude of style change. The use of four outlets to account for critics is admittedly only a proxy for critical evaluation as a whole, but a credible one for what knowledgeable critics would say.

While it is not what is tested here, it is certainly possible that critics affect designers through their impact on sales. Designers and design houses alter their styles systematically according to what sells and what does not sell. As stated earlier, we cannot envision this indirect effect to be as profound as a more direct effect, especially given the time constraints under which designers must create their new collections. But future research could look at the effect of sales on designers, utilizing more direct measures such as sales, profits or a similar index of market success at a collection level – that is the level where innovation occurs. These numbers are extremely difficult to ascertain in such a secretive industry, but this work would surely be welcomed. Only after documenting the impact of critics on sales could a connection between critics, sales and future styles be established. We believe, however, that the connection between critics and style changes we have shown is significant in that it documents for the first time the effect of outside influences in high-end fashion.

There is still plenty of room for future research to explore how styles evolve systematically over time, especially empirical studies. The paradox of fashion is the conflict between looking distinctive while giving the impression of a certain degree of uniformity. Understanding how stylistic innovation occurs and what drives its acceptance or rejection is an important area that should garner a lot of attention in the future.

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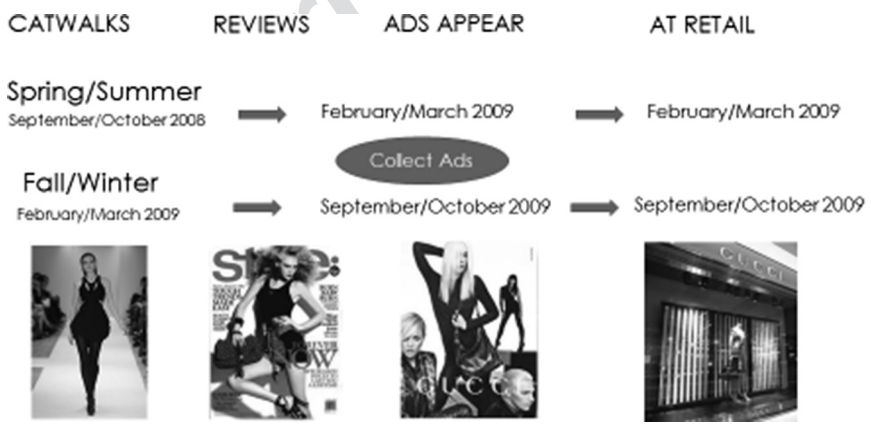
APPENDIX

Timeline of the Product Flow from Catwalks to Stores



Sample Ads

Vogue Italy

Advertisements from Alberto Ferretti (2000)

Advertisements from Alberto Ferretti (2001)

Author Query Form

Queries and/or remarks

[Q1]	The citation "Bourdieu, 1984" has been changed to match the author name/date in the reference list. Please check.
[Q2]	In the reference list Kroeber 1919a and 1919b are mentioned as separate references. Therefore we have changed all citations of Kroeber 1919 to Kroeber 1919a, 1919b. Please amend the citations in the text if necessary.
[Q3]	Missing reference: Kroeber (1940) is not listed in the “References” section; please provide complete reference details.
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[Q5]	In the reference list Robinson 1958a and 1958b are mentioned as separate references. Therefore we have changed the citation of Robinson 1958 to Robinson 1958a, 1958b. Please amend the citation in the text if necessary.
[Q6]	The citation "Zuckerman & Kim, 2003" has been changed to match the author name/ date in the reference list. Please check.
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[Q8]	Uncited reference: Litman and Hoekyun, 1998 is not cited in text; please indicate where a citation should appear or delete it from the reference list.
[Q9]	Please provide page range to the reference “Postrel, 2003”.
[Q10]	Please check if edits made to the reference “Simmel, 1904” are correct and amend if necessary.
[Q11]	Please provide editor name(s) to the reference “Simmel, 1995”.