Sandra Di Leo - Communication Design MSc

Empowering Grassroots Narratives

Assessing the Impact of Social Media Activism on Fashion Brand Communication

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↘ Abstract (ita)

In un'epoca sempre più segnata dall'avvento del digitale, il settore della moda ha subito importanti trasformazioni a fronte di nuovi cambiamenti sociali, mediatici e di consumo. Con l'affermarsi dei social media come catalizzatori di tali cambiamenti, i brand di moda hanno dovuto riadattare le proprie strategie di comunicazione abbracciando nuove esigenze di trasparenza e responsabilità sociale, al tempo stesso risultando più vulnerabili alle critiche dei consumatori. Lo scopo di questa tesi è quello di esplorare tali dinamiche, al fine di valutare l'impatto dell'attivismo digitale sulla comunicazione dei brand di moda. Attraverso un approccio qualitativo e multidisciplinare e l'analisi di casi studio di scandali imprevisti e campagne di attivismo nel sistema moda, la ricerca evidenzia l'impatto sociale e culturale del 'social media activism', al di là delle considerazioni finanziarie tradizionalmente affrontate nella letteratura accademica. L'indagine culmina nell'elaborazione di un Modello di Valutazione d'Impatto Sociale per la Comunicazione dei Brand di Moda, che indaga le conseguenze a lungo termine dell'attivismo digitale, fungendo da strumento di autovalutazione per i brand del settore e indirizzandoli verso azioni correttive per le proprie campagne di comunicazione. Facendo leva sulle pratiche di attivismo contemporanee e cogliendo la natura trasformativa della moda, i brand possono ricoprire un ruolo attivo nella produzione di valore sociale ed ambientale, diventando essi stessi promotori di cambiamenti significativi.

→ comunicazione di moda, attivismo digitale, social media, valutazione di impatto sociale, design per l'innovazione sociale.

↘ Abstract (eng)

In the digital age, the fashion industry has undergone significant transformations in response to changes in society, media, and consumer expectations. Social media's role as a catalyst for social justice has increased awareness of industry-related issues, urging fashion brands to adjust their communication strategies to new demands for transparency and social responsibility, while making them vulnerable to criticism. This thesis explores these dynamics, focusing on the impact of social media activism on fashion brand communication. Adopting a qualitative and multidisciplinary methodology and a case study approach - examining unintentional scandals and digital activism campaigns targeting the fashion industry - the research reveals the social and cultural influence of social media activism, beyond financial considerations traditionally addressed in academic literature. The thesis culminates in the development of a Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication that offers insights into the long-term effectiveness of digital activism, serving as a self-assessment tool for practitioners and guiding their decision-making processes towards corrective actions for communication campaigns. By engaging with contemporary activism practices and embracing the transformative nature of fashion, brands can play an active role in generating wider social and environmental value.

→ fashion brand communication, digital activism, social media, social impact assessment, design for social innovation.

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→ Chapter 5. Social Innovation and Impact Assessment in Fashion Communication

↘ 1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, the way people interact, access information, and engage with social issues has significantly transformed. The rise of social media platforms has revolutionised communication dynamics, providing individuals and communities with unprecedented opportunities to mobilise for causes they believe in. This shift in the communication landscape has given rise to a new era of activism, where social media platforms have become powerful catalysts for advocating social change.

Within the fashion industry, this has manifested through unintended scandals and controversies, driven by consumer demand for transparency, accountability, and ethical practices. These have emerged as a result of social media's ability to amplify voices and hold brands accountable. Instances of cultural appropriation, insensitive marketing campaigns, and discriminatory practices have been exposed, urging fashion companies to confront their actions and address the concerns raised by their customers.

In this context, where the communication strategies of fashion brands are under the constant scrutiny of socially conscious audiences, the need for a comprehensive approach to fashion communication emerges. This is where the role of design assumes crucial significance for this research: recognising the relationship between communication dynamics, societal values, and the evolving role of social media activism, a design perspective offers a holistic framework. Designers act as a bridge between the brand and its audience, translating the values and messages of activist movements into tangible initiatives. By doing so, designers can not only shape fashion narratives but also reshape societal perceptions and expectations.

Based on these considerations, the primary area of research (Figure 1.1) focuses on the intersection of social media, activism, and fashion brand communication. By tackling this domain, this research proposes to uncover the dynamics that shape the relationship between fashion brands, designers, and contemporary audiences. It aims to understand how social media activism has transformed the traditional modes of brand communication and explore how fashion brands have responded to this new paradigm. The central research questions that guide this study are the following:

→ What is the impact of social media activism on fashion brand communication?

→ Which aspects of fashion communication are mostly affected by activism efforts, and how can these changes be assessed?

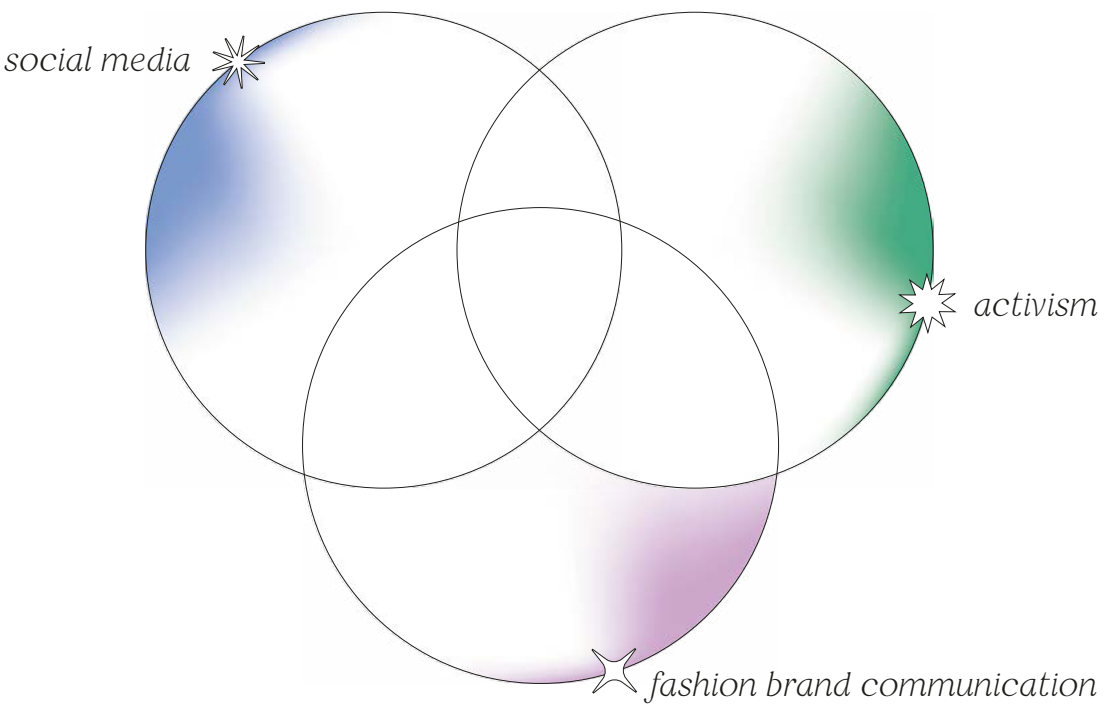
These questions seek to discover how social media activism shapes several aspects of fashion brand communication, including brand storytelling, consumer engagement, and overall brand perception within the fashion industry. By addressing these questions, the research aims to provide insights that can inform and guide fashion brands and designers in effectively navigating the complexities of the contemporary communication landscape.

To comprehensively address the research question, the thesis is organized into three main chapters, each focusing on different aspects of the research topic:

→ The first part, analysed in "Chapter 3 - Activist Dynamics in the Contemporary Communication Landscape", explores the changing paradigms of communication in the digital age, with a focus on the rise of social media and their impact on activist practices. It emphasises the different ways in which digital technologies support social movements' mobilisation and actions.

→ The second section, "Chapter 4 - Social Media as a Catalyst for Change: Implications in Fashion Brand Communication", focuses on the evolving nature of fashion brand communication in the era of social media activism. This chapter investigates the challenges and controversies that arise when fashion brands engage with social issues, discussing issues of authenticity and accountability.

→ The third and last area is "Chapter 5 - Social Innovation and Impact Assessment in Fashion Brand Communication". Here, the role of designers in driving social change is examined by adopting a social innovation perspective. This section includes the development of an analytic framework for effectively evaluating the impact of social media activism on fashion brand communication.



↓ **Figure 1.1** Graph illustrating the area of research at the intersection of social media, activism, and fashion brand communication.

↘ 2. Methodology

Driven by the recognition of the evolving landscape outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the methodology employed in this research to investigate how changes in society, media, and consumer expectations have influenced the way fashion brands communicate and engage with their audiences in the digital age.

To achieve this purpose, this study embraces a constructivist paradigm. This approach acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by individual experiences and social interactions (McKinley, 2015). By incorporating theories and concepts from diverse fields such as media and cultural studies, visual communication, fashion sociology, and social innovation, this multidisciplinary approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic within the broader context of societal and cultural influences in an increasingly digitised environment.

In the process of the research, the initial phase was inductive, aimed at providing a theoretical foundation and identifying challenges and opportunities within the research domain. This stage was driven by a specific set of objectives, listed as follows:

→ **1.** Understanding how media convergence and participatory culture have shaped the digital landscape and activism practices, including the development of transmedia activism.

→ **2.** Examining how social media activism challenges cultural narratives and promotes social justice while pointing out complexities and ethical considerations surrounding activist engagement on social media.

→ **3.** Contextualizing fashion within the larger societal framework, illustrating how it naturally participates in public opinion through its communicative ability.

→ **4.** Discussing changing power dynamics between brands and audiences, highlighting a shift in expectations for companies towards inclusivity, ethical practices, and active participation in the social discourse.

→ **5.** Exploring the evolving role of fashion brands role as creators of social narratives, driven by participatory processes on digital platforms and reflecting broader trends of democratization and mediatization in fashion.

→ **6.** Defining key features of social media actions targeting the fashion industry and examining their implications on brand narrative.

Within this area, it is crucial to address two main challenges that have been identified in the existing literature. First, communication crises and unintentional scandals related to social media remain under-theorized in fashion discourse, despite their potential to significantly impact fashion brands

→ **Table 2.1** Analytical Framework for Case Studies.

and their storytelling. While the literature on fashion and social media has made valuable contributions, there is a need for more comprehensive investigations that go beyond marketing perspectives to consider broader social and cultural implications of communication crises. Secondly, the potential of digital activism to drive transformative change within the fashion industry demands further exploration, as data about the efficacy and longevity of call-outs, consumer action, and cancel culture are limited. Moreover, questions surrounding the authenticity and motives of fashion activism also persist in literature, due to the industry's commercial nature and the pressures to meet market demands.

2.1 Case Study Approach

Among other methods for data collection and analysis, the case study approach results are particularly relevant in investigating the impact of social media activism on fashion brand communication. This approach focuses on analysing instances of unintentional scandals and digital activism campaigns within the fashion industry. As acknowledged in existing literature on brand crises (Hansen et al., 2018; Vänskä & Gurova, 2022), the importance of studying fashion scandals lies in their role as indicators of broader societal concerns that transcend the fashion domain. They demonstrate how social media platforms contribute to reshaping the societal landscape, introducing transformative changes to the fashion system. For this reason, the context surrounding each case, including the physical environment, and historical, economic, cultural, and social elements, was also considered. Overall, this contextual analysis provides a deeper understanding of the factors influencing fashion brand communication and the dynamics of social media activism within the fashion industry.

To systematically analyze these cases, an analytical framework (Table 2.1) was developed encompassing various dimensions. The model is structured across five main sections - Background, Storyline, Social media action characteristics, Case perception, and Impact on brand communication - each of which is subdivided into several criteria, as illustrated by Table 2.1. Data for the case studies were gathered from diverse sources, including archival documents, newspaper articles, official records, videos, documentaries, podcasts, research papers, and social media posts, providing a comprehensive basis for analysis.

→ The Background section serves as the foundation for understanding the broader context of each case study. It establishes the general subject of investigation - including a controversial fashion campaign, an activism campaign, or more generally, problematic practices within the industry - to provide an overall view of the main theme tackled. The specific social or cultural concerns within the identified topic are further specified by the 'social issue' parameter. Key actors involved in the activism are also analysed, as well as the specific regions or cultural contexts where the case unfolds.

→ The Storyline dimension identifies the trigger initiating the activism and the chronological sequence of events. The first criterion is built on Hansen et al.'s (2018) distinction of different forms of 'failure' serving as a motivational input for an online firestorm. According to the authors (Hansen et al., 2018, p. 561), "A value-related crisis [...] pertains to social or ethical issues surrounding the brand. Among value-related crises, we further distinguish a social failure, such as poor working conditions [at a company], from a communication failure caused by offensive

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CASE STUDIES		
DIMENSION	**CRITERIA**	**DESCRIPTION**
BACKGROUND	Topic	The general subject under investigation.
	Social issue	The specific social or cultural concern addressed within the topic.
	Actors	Key individuals, organisations, and entities involved or targeted in the activism.
	Geographical and cultural area	The specific regions or cultural contexts where the activism takes place.
STORYLINE	Trigger	The initial situation that initiates the activism, including communication failures, problematic behaviour, or intentionally polarising content by the brand.
	Timeline	The chronological sequence of events related to the activism.
SOCIAL MEDIA ACTION CHARACTERISTICS	Category of activism	Classification of activism efforts based on distinct features and nature.
	Approach	The strategy and decision-making process of activism efforts, distinguishing between top-down and bottom-up.
	Main platforms	The primary social media platforms where activism efforts occur.
	Forms of online activism	The specific activities and actions undertaken by activists.
	Visual languages	The visual elements, graphics, and imagery used in the activism to convey messages.
	Reach and engagement	The extent to which the campaign has reached the target audience and engaged them in the social cause.
CASE PERCEPTION	Sentiment on social media	The general emotions and opinions expressed on social media regarding the specific case.
	Memory retention	The degree to which the case remains in public discourse and collective memory.
	Keywords trends	Trending keywords and phrases associated with the case.
	Traditional media coverage	The attention the case has received in mainstream media and its influence on the case's progression.
	Case-specific observations	Specific patterns, circumstances, and elements that contribute to the perception of the case and its role in larger societal discussion.
IMPACT ON BRAND COMMUNICATION	Short-term impact and brand reaction	The immediate consequences of the activism and the actions taken by the brand in response to the situation.
	Consistency in brand storytelling	The extent to which the issue has affected the brand's narrative, identity, and communication.
	Changes in social media communication	Shifts in messaging strategies and online interactions employed by the brand.

messages from a company". A third type of trigger has been identified in provocative or polarizing content, referring to cases in which activism is generated by a brand's content, marketing campaigns, or actions that intentionally provoke strong reactions, both positive and negative, often leading to polarisation and discussions.

→ The third category is related to the **Social media action characteristics**, including types of activism efforts, strategic approach, primary platforms involved, specific activities undertaken by activists, visual languages used, and the reach and engagement achieved. By categorizing activism based on its distinct features and nature, several types of activism emerge: online firestorms, defined as "the sudden occurrence of many, predominantly negative social media expressions against a brand" (Hansen et al., 2018, p. 557); advocacy campaigns, meaning organized effort to raise public awareness about a specific issue, cause, or topic through social media; brand bravery, involving brands taking a public stance on social or political issues, even if it entails some level of risk or controversy; and sustained criticism, related to the continuous and ongoing critique or disapproval of a brand, organization, or issue over an extended period. Activism can also be classified according to the strategy and decision-making processes employed in activism efforts, making a distinction between top-down actions, carried out by opinion leaders in the fashion field, and bottom-up ones, triggered by Internet users usually as a response to injustice. Moreover, it is fundamental to address the online platforms where activism unfolds, recognizing each platform's affordances, especially in relation to the distinct activities they trigger and the visual languages they allow. Finally, an essential characteristic of digital activism efforts is their reach within the target audience and the level of engagement they generate.

→ **Case perception** examines the aftermath of the controversies examined, capturing how these resonate with audiences on social media in terms of general emotions, persistence in public discourse and collective memory, and trending phrases and concepts linked to the case. This dimension does not only focus on social media but also aims to understand the case's reception in mainstream media, acknowledging its potential to influence the case's developments. Finally, specific patterns, circumstances, and elements that contribute to the case's perception are highlighted.

→ Lastly, the **Impact on brand communication** section evaluates the short-term consequences of the activism, offering a timeline of the brand's response during and after the incidents. This dimension also describes longer-term consequences, assessing whether and how the controversy affects the brand's narrative and social media strategy, shaping its identity. Together, these aspects help understand how social media activism leaves a lasting impression on how brands communicate and interact with their audiences.

The analysis framework was systematically applied to a number of cases. By using this framework across different examples, an understanding of the patterns, similarities, and differences among them was drawn. The cases will be further examined in Appendix A and include:

→ **Brandy Melville's Diversity Controversy**: Since the early 2010s, Brandy Melville has faced sustained criticism for promoting a singular ideal of beauty, which excluded racial and body diversity. The brand also faced allegations of racially biased hiring decisions and a discriminatory work environment.

→ **"Who Made My Clothes?" by Fashion Revolution**: Triggered by the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, the campaign aimed to raise awareness about the working conditions and transparency issues within the fashion industry. It encouraged consumers to question brands about their supply chains and demand greater accountability.

→ **Gucci Blackface Controversy**: Gucci faced a major scandal when a sweater that resembled blackface imagery was released as part of the brand's Fall 2018 Ready-to-Wear fashion show. The incident sparked outrage and led to widespread criticism of the brand for insensitivity and cultural appropriation.

→ **The Fall of Victoria's Secret**: In 2018, Victoria's Secret faced criticism for discriminatory comments towards transgender and plus-size women from former executive Ed Razek, raising concerns about the brand's commitment to inclusivity. Additionally, the brand's ties to the Jeffrey Epstein scandal fueled discussions about its image and corporate associations.

→ **Dolce & Gabbana's Cultural Scandal in China**: In 2018, Dolce & Gabbana faced backlash after releasing a series of videos that were perceived as insensitive towards Chinese culture. The controversy deepened with offensive messages from co-founder Stefano Gabbana, leading to the show's cancellation and a significant impact on the brand's reputation in China.

→ **Valentino's Stand for Inclusivity**: In 2021, Valentino faced backlash over a gender-fluid image featuring photographer Michael Bailey Gates. In response to the negative comments, the creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli, supported the model and condemned hate, violence, and discrimination. The incident sparked discussions about challenging societal norms and promoting inclusivity in the fashion industry.

→ **Alexander Wang Sexual Misconduct**: In December 2020, Alexander Wang, the CEO and Creative Director of his eponymous brand, faced allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct. The accusations sparked conversations about power dynamics within the fashion industry and the need for accountability and change regarding workplace behaviour.

→ **Balenciaga's Controversial Ad**: Balenciaga sparked outrage with a controversial ad campaign that faced allegations of sexualising children. The incident, which occurred in 2022, exposed ethical concerns and Balenciaga's provocative history.

After an in-depth analysis of each case study, a gap was identified. While the analytical framework described above offers an understanding of the immediate effects of social media activism on how fashion brands communicate, a more holistic assessment of long-term impacts across various dimensions is needed. To bridge this gap, the research extends its focus to include perspectives from the domain of Social Innovation, and especially Design for Social Innovation. Specifically, it examines existing impact assessment models in the literature, identifying a final output in the development of a tailored Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication. This model - described in the final section of the research - evaluates the long-term effects of social media activism on fashion brand communication according to different levels and perspectives and ultimately provides a more comprehensive picture of the transformative power of design and activism.

→ **Figure 3.1** Sonia Kretschmar's art, featured in The Washington Post's 'Where the legal system silences women', portrays the challenges faced by women in the #MeToo movement.

↘ **Figure 3.2** Activists protest in support of the #MeToo movement, photography by Patrick T. Fallon / Reuters.

↘ 3. Activist Dynamics in the Contemporary Communication Landscape

Within the broader purpose of this thesis, this chapter aims to illustrate the evolving dynamics of activism in the digital age and its impact on communication practices. It provides an analysis of the transformative nature of social media and its role in shaping social movements and collective action, also attempting to investigate the changing role of designers in this context. This research begins with Section 3.1, titled “Media Participation and Convergence Culture”, which explores the contemporary landscape of communication, driven by a process of media convergence. This context has seen a revolution in the way individuals consume and participate in media, leading to the emergence of decentralised and collaborative production networks. Later, the chapter delves into the understanding of activism and social movements in the context of social media. To approach this topic from a design perspective, it also explores the activist role of designers in the digital age, introducing the concepts of ‘design activism’ and ‘transmedia activism’, and explaining how design and storytelling can be used to drive social transformation.

3.1 Media Participation and Convergence Culture

3.1.1 Changing Paradigms of Communication and New Media

The contemporary communication and media landscape has reached a remarkable level of complexity, marked by a radical change in the underlying structure of society. This cultural paradigm has created a networked culture characterised by flexibility, modularity, and fluidity, introducing new modes of knowledge, relationship dynamics, and design principles. This scenario gives rise to an unprecedented amount of content, creating an environment where audience expectations regarding the production and consumption of information are constantly changing.

This phenomenon is described by media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006, p. 2) in the book "Convergence Culture", where the author investigates the development of a culture of convergence,

"where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways".

This convergence of media, driven by the internet and social networking platforms, enables greater participation from grassroots communities. According to the author, convergence culture is primarily shaped by three core concepts: media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence.

The definition of 'media convergence' provided by Jenkins (2006) goes beyond the notion of a technological process blending various devices for information delivery. It embraces the idea of convergence as a complex interplay of cultural, social, technological, and economic transformations. In particular, he describes media convergence as

"the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2).

From this definition, it is evident that the collision of different media happens to be a cultural necessity of contemporary times, rather than a mere technological choice, encouraging audiences to actively seek new information and create connections between content consumed on diverse platforms.

As recalled by Jenkins (2006), the concept of convergence within the media industry was first introduced in Pool's "Technologies of Freedom" (1983). The author highlighted the 'convergence of modes' process that blurs the boundaries between different forms of media, including point-to-point communication, such as the post and telephone, and mass communications, like the press, radio, and TV. This concept implies that a single physical infrastructure, like wires or cables, now carries services that were once separate, and conversely, a service previously provided by a specific medium can now

be delivered through various physical means. This erodes the traditional one-to-one relationship between a medium and its use. Moreover, the distinctions between media types, based on centralisation or decentralisation, scarcity or abundance, news or entertainment, and governmental or private ownership, were seen by Pool (1983) as the result of political choices rather than inherent characteristics of technologies. However, in his eyes, some communication technologies supported greater freedom and participation through decentralisation, while central control was more likely with monopolised means of communication. Building on these foundations, Jenkins (2006) agrees that several factors have broken the barriers separating different media, including digitisation, which allows the same content to flow through multiple channels and forms. This process was facilitated by new patterns of cross-media ownership that began in the mid-1980s, leading to a gradual transition where various media systems both competed and collaborated. As a result of the changes produced by convergence, new opportunities for creative expression appeared, and large media corporations gained more power. These transformations are crucial in determining how popular culture has been reshaped, especially concerning the relationship between media audiences, producers, and content. The phenomenon of convergence relies in fact on the active participation of consumers, which influences the way content is shared and distributed.

The idea of 'participatory culture' marks a significant departure from the traditional top-down model of passive media consumption. It reframes media producers and consumers, who become active participants engaging with each other within new sets of rules. In this context, people contribute to the production of media content, which is then shared within the networks they are a part of across various media platforms. However, it is important to note that not all participants are equal in this dynamic, as corporations still hold more influence than consumers, whether individually or collectively. Despite this, such networks still hold a powerful role, as convergence mostly manifests in the minds of individual consumers and through their social interactions. The exploration of new virtual spaces for discussion and dialogue has facilitated the emergence of new networking practices, such as blogs and social media. This shift generated radical changes in the way audiences interact both online and with traditional media, with individuals becoming active creators of content within virtual global communities. Ultimately, the idea of a participatory culture translates into a new cultural paradigm defined by a constant quest for connectivity and new relationships between consumers and content.

When discussing participation, it is essential to distinguish it from the concept of interactivity, which is related to the responsiveness of technologies to consumer feedback. This varies among communication technologies, from television, which allows minimal interaction (e.g., changing channels), to video games that enable consumers to actively influence the virtual world they interact with. The limitations of interactivity are mainly determined by technological factors and pre-constructed by the technology's designers. In contrast, participation is influenced by cultural and social norms. The extent of participation in media consumption does not only depend on the medium itself but is shaped by the preferences of audiences within different cultural contexts. Participation is depicted by Jenkins (2006) as more open-ended and less controlled by media producers, giving more power to media consumers.

Participatory culture has historical roots in practices that existed during the twentieth century but were not fully

→ **Figure 3.3** Close-up of a vintage toy printing press, showcased at The International Printing Museum in Carson, California, recalling the mid-19th century fanzine movement. As enthusiasts hand-set type during the Civil War, they laid the early foundations of fan culture, as noted by Jenkins (2006).

understood or embraced by the traditional media industry at that time. Early examples of consumer engagement in production can be found in the toy printing press movement (Figure 3.3) during the American Civil War, where 'fanzines' were produced, demonstrating the intricate relationship between consumer culture, popular culture, and activism (Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022). As illustrated, instances of contemporary participatory culture were happening to some extent, but later came to the forefront with the advent of digital technologies and the internet, forcing the media sector to address the implications of this cultural transformation for their commercial interests. Whereas in the past consumers could interact with media under controlled conditions, with this shift they became involved in the creation and distribution of cultural content on their terms.

This process was further enhanced by the advent of Web 2.0, when the Internet evolved into a dynamic space for disseminating and sharing media content within networks, introducing new possibilities for user engagement and social interactions. In the 1990s, there was a belief that digital technology would replace traditional media, leading to a transition from 'passive old media' to 'interactive new media', where broadcasting would be replaced by niche, on-demand content. However, the convergence paradigm defined by Jenkins (2006) describes a more intricate interaction between old and new media, contrasting the assumption that new media would entirely replace old media.

To properly understand this concept, it is fundamental to acknowledge what distinguishes media from delivery systems: while delivery systems are simply technologies and are subject to change over time, media are also cultural systems. As such, they persist as layers in the communication landscape, coexisting with and adapting to new technologies. While media's contents and audiences may change, their core functions continue within a broader system. In this sense, convergence is a more effective way to understand recent changes in media than the previous digital revolution paradigm, which opposes old and new media.

Since media pertain a cultural value, convergence is more than a technological shift: it transforms the relationships between technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences, altering the way media industries function and how consumers engage with news and entertainment. Moreover, convergence is a continuous process, not a final destination, with media becoming ubiquitous due to the proliferation of channels and portable technologies. This way, convergence impacts both media production and consumption, and it extends beyond entertainment to integrate various intimate aspects of our lives and social interactions such as memories, relationships, and fantasies.

Hence, to navigate contemporary moments of transformative change, industry leaders have turned back to the idea of convergence, giving new significance to an old concept. In the context of media and the web, the idea of a 'horizontal revolution' reflects the transformations towards increased interaction, collaboration, and participation in digital spaces, which marked the shift of audiences from passive spectators to active and interconnected participating actors. Key catalysing elements for this evolution include the growing number of internet users, the multifunctionality of consumer electronics, the affordability of devices, and above all the emergence of social media platforms.

In discussing these enabling elements of this new media ecology, it is important to focus on the impact they had on media habits and cultural practices, rather than on their technological properties. The shift in consumer habits is an added complexity of this landscape, having altered shopping behaviour, social connections, and everyday consumption practices, ultimately impacting our lifestyles, and consumer identities. Indeed, this new media ecology has prompted the emergence of several social practices, which redefined accessibility, distribution, and creation of content. Starting from accessibility, it must be noted that the internet's multitude of content allows users to easily access an abundance of content, leading to an overwhelming flow of available knowledge. As audiences can navigate and consume information of interest in a more interactive and interconnected way, they engage in non-linear consumption patterns within hypermedia environments (Lovato, 2018). Secondly, the transformation of the web into a universal platform has impacted distribution, connecting users, businesses, and organisations in networked virtual spaces. This resulted in a hybrid circulation of information, including top-down and bottom-up distribution, where audiences can shape media flows in a participatory manner. Lastly, the redefinition of content creation implied the emergence of a new mindset for design. Free access to software and sharing platforms encourages collaborative creation, boosting user-generated content (UGC) and crowdsourcing, fostering collective knowledge creation with platforms such as Wikipedia. In this context, individuals encounter minimal obstacles to both artistic expression and civic engagement, resulting in an environment that supports the creation of knowledge and creative works. Indeed, these factors enhance the sense of social connection among communities, with audiences gaining empowerment and influence.

Overall, this participative shift disrupts traditional consumption models, evolving from a one-to-many structure to a grassroots one. This is especially true for media companies - including a range of areas like marketing, advertising, public relations, and journalism - and other 'creative industries'. This term is related to industries that have their origin in creativity and talent, and that can generate and exploit intellectual property, such as crafts, design, fashion, film, music, or performing arts (British Department of Culture, Media, and Sports,

1998). With media convergence, the roles of cultural producers and consumers continually transform, resulting in decentralised and collaborative production. Media companies reflect this shift, with heterarchy - opposed to hierarchy - gaining prominence in businesses. As noted by Deuze (2007, p. 17), in convergence culture, the media industry is

"struggling to define its ambiguous role as partner as well as profiteer in a participatory media culture, and as the traditional authoritative voice in public discourses".

Therefore, as participation becomes increasingly prominent and audiences become active 'prosumers', established industry norms are continuously challenged, with increasing questions about the role of media producers and the changing expectations of media consumers in an era of digital participation. Online, practices such as citizen journalism and influencer culture have disrupted traditional power dynamics, doubting the authority of traditional media gatekeepers and empowering individuals to have a significant impact on public discourse. In the case of citizen journalism, increasingly democratised visibility and UGC have emancipated audiences from traditional information control historically held by publishers. Before the digital era, the public occupied the end of the information chain, with consumption behaviours ruled by institutional media. Social media has disrupted this model, allowing universal access to social and cultural phenomena. In essence, the logic of convergence determines that anyone can have a voice in the global discourse.

Within this context of active participation and networked communication, each participant constructs

"[their] own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3).

Our unique experiences of the world are therefore mediated by the collection and interpretation of fragments of information from the media that surrounds us, shaping our personal narratives and perceptions. Because of the overwhelming volume of information we approach, people are led to discuss the media they consume with one another. According to Jenkins (Jenkins, 2006), this consumption process has evolved into a collective effort, referred to as 'collective intelligence', a concept introduced by French cybertheorist Pierre Lévy (1997). This term refers to the ability to combine knowledge and exchange opinions to achieve a shared goal, typically within online networks, which enable access to a wide range of information. Media consumption is evolving toward collaboration, leading to the formation of shared meanings and emphasising sharing as a central aspect of media. Through collective intelligence, communities are empowered to learn from each other, fostering a culture of knowledge, experimenting with new solutions, and acknowledging problem-solving as a collective effort. Lévy (1997) recognises this as a significant opportunity for grassroots movements to establish an alternative source of power, driven by communities capable of resisting the influence of institutions and corporations. As also noted by Jenkins (2006, p. 4), while this collective ability has been largely employed for entertainment purposes, the transformation of "collective meaning-making within popular culture" can reshape "the ways religion, education, law, politics, advertising, and even the military operate".

Having described the current media landscape, it is, however, necessary to point out a paradox noted by Jenkins (2006) and Deuze (2007). According to both scholars, while new technologies have reduced costs and expanded delivery options within the

media context, the entertainment and news industries are still dominated by a small number of multinational corporations. Convergence manifests in fact as a dual process, driven both by corporations, through a top-down mechanism, and by consumers, in a bottom-up manner. Especially online, professional and amateur media creators coexist. On one hand, media companies aim to increase the flow of content across different channels to grow revenue, expand markets, and engage viewers; on the other hand, consumers use different media technologies to gain more control over their media consumption and interact with others, with higher expectations for "a freer flow of ideas and content" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18). A growing dissatisfaction with the exclusive nature of professional media has in fact led people to explore alternative formats, often user-generated (Deuze, 2007). Bottom-up convergence is embodied, for example, in the work of game modders, who use code and design tools initially developed for commercial games as a base for their amateur game production. In essence, corporate and grassroots convergence coexist, at times complementing each other, at times conflicting, but always working together to contribute to the flow of content and shape the future of popular culture. As stated by Jenkins (2006, pp. 18–19),

"Convergence requires media companies to rethink old assumptions about what it means to consume media, assumptions that shape both programming and marketing decisions. If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public".

As convergence culture forces media companies to understand new consumption dynamics, media conglomerates are presented with both opportunities, such as the expansion of their markets and content across platforms, and risks, like that of market fragmentation. Moreover, with the coexistence of participatory media production and individualised media consumption, media companies can share their operations at different degrees of openness. This signifies that the same technologies that enable participation also encourage a global corporate media system that is less transparent, interactive, or participatory. On the other hand, consumers are involved in co-creation, feeling a sense of ownership or agency over content, but still appear to be serving the media industry's agenda (Deuze, 2007).

As demonstrated in this section, the proliferation and ubiquitous nature of social networks and electronic devices, which have made digital communication possible, created a process of convergence between the old and new ways of telling stories and distributing content. In digital ecosystems, stories are structured through content disseminated along different touchpoints and social networks, in a real 'transmedia' manner. This paradigm, which will be discussed in the following section, aims to increase interactivity and participation processes: today, the audience's role is not limited to that of a mere viewer and is rather to take part in the story and interpret it through his standpoint, adding value to the narrative itself.

3.1.2 Co-creating Narratives: Transmedia Storytelling

In the convergent era, the need emerges for new design practices to meet the evolving digital landscape, where the convergence of media has become inevitable, and people actively seek new forms of interaction. As explained, this shift has impacted the consumption patterns of audiences, who engage with narratives across different channels and devices, beyond the boundaries

→ **Figure 3.4** Still from "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire", Francis Lawrence (2013).

imposed by individual media. This scenario naturally leads to the emergence of what Jenkins (2003) introduces as 'transmedia storytelling', a design construct that revolutionises storytelling by creating narratives that unfold across different media platforms.

The idea of transmedia storytelling was first conceptualized by Jenkins in his article "Transmedia Storytelling: Moving Characters from Books to Films to Video Games Can Make Them Stronger and More Compelling" (2003) and later in-depth analysed in his book "Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide" (2006), which describes transmedia storytelling as a phenomenon closely related to the media convergence that began in the early 2000s.

The concept is defined by Jenkins (2003, p. 293) as

"Stories that unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world, a more integrated approach to franchise development than models based on urtexts and ancillary products".

The idea behind transmedia storytelling is to create a "unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins, 2010, p. 944), constructing an immersive and interconnected narrative world, where audiences can explore different aspects of the story and characters across different media. This approach encourages active audience participation and engagement, allowing them to become deeply involved in the narrative and connect with it on multiple levels.

The growing need to engage audiences more effectively has made the use of single channels often inadequate in conveying the complexity of a story, leading to the use of multi-channel narratives. Besides transmedia storytelling, this category includes cross-media narratives. The two are often confused, as both distribute the story across multiple media simultaneously; however, they involve significant differences. The concept of cross-media revolves around narratives that extend across different media while maintaining consistent content, with each platform offering a different adaptation of the same core storyline. An example of cross-media storytelling is represented by book-to-movie adaptations, such as "The Hunger Games" (Figure 3.4) or "The Twilight Saga" (Figure 3.5). In contrast, transmedia storytelling describes the existence of several interconnected storylines within a shared narrative world, which represents a co-created construct between producers and audiences. In this case, the multi-platform and multi-channel systems are not used to tell a single story, but rather different points of view or different moments in a story that unfolds more broadly. Hence, the storyline is never reproduced

← **Figure 3.5** Still from "The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1", Bill Condon (2011).

← **Figure 3.6** Still from "The Matrix", the Wachowskis (1999).

identically across platforms, with each one contributing to the plot with unique content. These additional elements offer multiple perspectives, experiences, or even independent stories set within the same storyworld, which all together strengthen the audience's understanding of the narrative universe. This mechanism demands the user to reconstruct the overall meaning of a work by integrating various media to uncover all meanings and messages behind the narrative. In the process, the role of the user concerning the story evolves into a more participatory dimension. By providing consumers with a pervasive experience and multiple entry points to the story, they can explore intricate worlds and develop new interactions and relationships, feeling empowerment in becoming active participants.

Indeed, we can refer to a true synergy between the author and the audience, which not only consumes the content but takes an active involvement in it. Resuming the thoughts of Max Giovagnoli (2017, p. XIII–XIV), an Italian pioneer in the field, transmedia is not only a

"new geography of storytelling, but it is also a mode of expression and an industrial option at the same time. It is an original and complex way to arouse emotions in multiple audiences and to interpret reality by 'crossing' imagination and memories, taking us to the places that belong to us, exploiting the products we are attached to and the devices we keep in our pockets, following the trends we ordinarily ride and all the other spaces of presence and identity that we inhabit every day in the global game of contemporary communication" (Giovagnoli, 2017, p. XIII–XIV).

The different media thus interact as pieces of a large mosaic which involves the user in its creation. The more the story resonates with his values, the more he becomes a participant in the conversation and not just a spectator of it.

Summarising what has been stated thus far, it is possible to identify three key principles of transmedia projects: the presence of a unified narrative world able to contain multiple storylines and characters; the use of a multichannel structure to distribute stories across different platforms; audience participation, which - recalling the distinction between participation and interactivity - goes beyond interaction with pre-design content and includes contributions to the narrative's development through comments, discussions, and UGC. With these conditions, the audience can assume various roles, such as reader, viewer, participant, commentator, player, and content creator (Ciancia, 2018). In this sense, the transmedia model has the potential to create a participatory media environment by embracing diverse perspectives and highlighting the creative capacities of the contemporary audience.

In his study "Convergence Culture", Jenkins (2006) proposes the cyberpunk media franchise "The Matrix" (Figure 3.6), directed by the Wachowski sisters, as a pioneering example of transmedia storytelling. The narrative world in "The Matrix" describes a dystopian future, featuring a simulated reality controlled by machines, where humanity is trapped; the storyline unfolds the protagonist Neo's journey to liberate humanity from the Matrix's control and awaken them to the truth. What is remarkable about the franchise is the creation of a complex, non-linear narrative structure that crosses a diverse range of media, including movies, animated short films, comics, and games, which all convey additional information to enrich the main plot. By engaging with secondary materials, consumers who only watched the movies can gain new insights and understanding, with greater entertainment value and the possibility of multiple entry points to the franchise.

In literature, the concept of transmedia storytelling has raised questions about its potential to extend beyond entertainment and be effectively used in domains such as education and information dissemination, and as a tool to drive social change. To explore these possibilities, it is essential to first examine the evolution of activism practices in the context of media convergence, especially in relation to the emergence of social media activism. As traditional and new media intertwine, activism has found new paths for awareness, mobilisation, and impact. In particular, social media has created a decentralised space for organising action and supporting social conversations globally. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to evaluate the possible applications of transmedia storytelling for social change, diving into the fields of 'transmedia storytelling for good' and 'transmedia activism' later in the research.

3.2 Social Media Activism

3.2.1 Understanding Activism and Social Movements

Social protest has its roots in the democratic wave of the nineteenth century, when, following the French Revolution and the emergence of democratic governments, citizens felt a necessity to claim their rights. Before that, political activism was almost only associated with rebellion against authoritarian regimes. In contrast, participatory democracy, as theorised by philosopher Arnold Kaufmann in the 1960s, encouraged citizens to actively shape their collective political destinies by reclaiming the public sphere (Menser, 2018). For these reasons, the origins of modern problems can be traced to the debates sparked by the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Carol Mueller (Bobo et al., 2004), the main theoretical aspects of participation during this time involved engaging civil society in public decisions, reducing hierarchy, and advocating for direct action in response to fear and alienation.

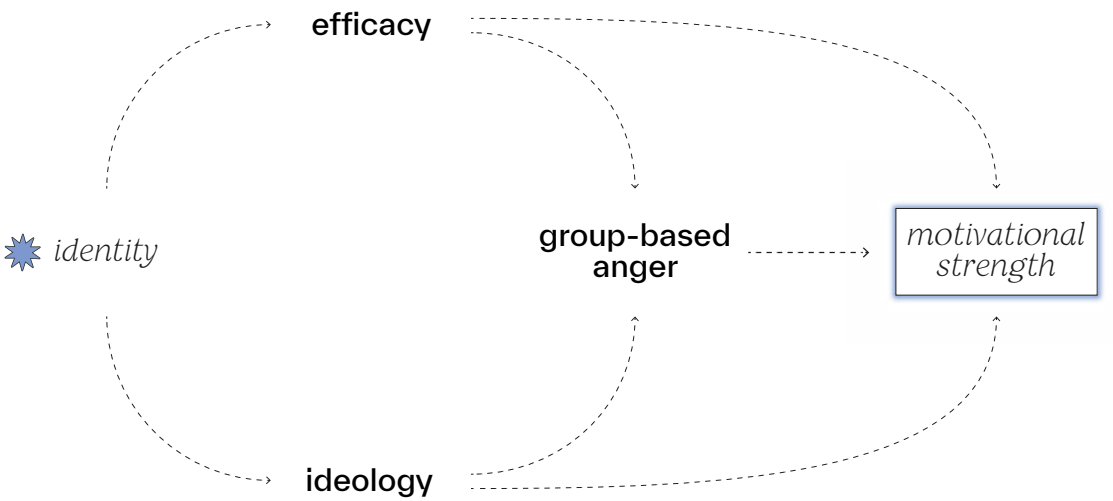
In this context, the term 'activism' refers to a wide range of actions aimed at bringing about social, cultural, and political changes. As societies have evolved from industrial to post-industrial, consumer, and knowledge-based economies, so has the nature of activism, which has become increasingly diverse thanks to the advent of ITC platforms, particularly the Internet. Activists, who engage in these transformative actions, can be associated with social, environmental, or political movements both on a local and global scale. These movements can be based on collective or individual actions, and activists often play a key role in their formation and development. Social movements are defined by the collective confrontation of elites, where individuals with shared objectives come together in solidarity and engage in prolonged interactions with elites, adversaries, and authorities (Tarrow, 1994). This definition emphasises the notion of social movements as a form of collective action, where people with shared goals challenge existing power structures and dynamics, questioning cultural norms and social authorities. This is done through sustained interactions with these entities and long-term commitment to the cause: the challenges are not isolated, but rather a continuous effort to effect change, highlighting unity and resilience inherent in such movements, and the power of collective action in catalysing social change. At a professional level, the activism sector is composed of non-profit, charitable, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that work across a range of areas, including politics, society, the environment, institutions, and the economy.

Based on these foundations, activism can be investigated according to a definition provided by Fuad-Luke (2009, p. 6), who states that the essence of activism lies in

"taking actions to catalyse, encourage or bring about change, in order to elicit social, cultural and/or political transformations. It can also involve transformation of the individual activists".

Activism manifests through diverse efforts and actions aimed at influencing public opinion, policies, or behaviours, taking various forms like protests, rallies, online initiatives, boycotts, and grassroots activities. Motivations behind activism often arise from a sense of moral responsibility, a desire for equity, a commitment towards a better future, or personal experiences of injustice. In essence, people engage in activism when reality conflicts with their ideals and when they perceive a threat from mainstream and institutional norms, especially in the case of marginalised groups who have historically suffered mistreatment, discrimination, and

social exclusion. This sentiment of anger fuels groups, leading to participation in community protests. This process is described by Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans's (2013) Motivational Framework (Figure 3.7), according to which it is possible to identify the emotional and identity mechanisms which have promoted social progress throughout history, from civil rights movements to environmentalism.



↓ **Figure 3.7** Motivational Framework integrating identities, grievances and emotions (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013, p. 897).

In exploring the motivations behind activism, it is essential to recognise that activism is generally led by members of marginalised groups, with allies joining to support these communities and promote social justice. Tracing the experiences of underrepresented groups can help better understand their motivations and contributions in advocating for social change. A noteworthy concept in this regard is that of intersectionality, which acknowledges the intersecting forms of oppression faced by marginalised groups. This concept highlights the interconnected nature of social identities, proving that these can not be understood based on a single aspect and demanding inclusive approaches to social change. This is especially important given that underrepresented groups find strength through collective action and community building, with activism generating a sense of belonging, support and resilience among different social categories.

For instance, the Stonewall Protests (Figure 3.8) in June 1969 played a key role in the history of intersectional activism, particularly for the queer community, as they led to a significant advancement of LGBTQ+ rights. These protests were triggered by a police raid on New York's Stonewall Inn, a popular gathering place for the community, and provided an opportunity for queer individuals to resist oppressive systems and ongoing harassment. Prominent figures in the movement were BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) individuals like drag queen Marsha P. Johnson (Figure 3.9) and transgender woman Sylvia Rivera, who not only fought for LGBTQ+ rights but also highlighted the intersectional nature of discrimination. The Stonewall protests marked the beginning of the modern LGBTQ+ movement, increasing its visibility and political power, and ultimately leading to the achievement of greater rights and respect. The annual Pride parades (Figure 3.10), commemorating the riots, have been essential in advancing this progress.

According to Jenkins and Kozinets (2022), the features of intersectionality and empathy are even more central in contemporary movements. In contrast to historical movements that sometimes overlooked these aspects, the current generation,

→ **Figure 3.8** A group of people celebrate outside the Stonewall-Inn after riots over the weekend of June 27, 1969.

↘ **Figure 3.9** Marsha P. Johnson (left) during a 1982 Pride March.

↘ **Figure 3.10** Two young activists walking during the first Stonewall anniversary march, then known as Gay Liberation Day, and later as Gay Pride Day, New York, New York, June 28, 1970.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exemplified by movements like Black Lives Matter, embraces a multitude of interconnected issues. For instance, the Parkland kids leading the Gun Control movement consciously addressed issues beyond school shootings, connecting with activists from different backgrounds, such as those involved in native rights protests and fighting against police violence, with an intersectional approach to fostering inclusivity and understanding diverse perspectives.

Connecting these historical examples to the broader context of social movements, they serve as illustrations of the three main characteristics of social movements outlined by Della Porta and Diani (2006), showcasing conflictive relationships with oppressive systems, establishing dense informal networks within their collective struggle, and fostering a shared collective identity, also centred around the intersectional nature of their challenges.

↓ **Figure 3.11** Protesters used hand-held cameras to capture footage of the Battle for Seattle and share it on the Internet. The Seattle WTO protests represented one of the first attempts for activists to "reclaim the media".

Nevertheless, the majority of the significant political events witnessed in the twentieth century were still tied to traditional means of communication, with some of the latest protests and revolutions of the pre-ICTs era being the student revolt in Tiananmen Square and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Indeed, the advent of ICTs marked a shift in social movement organisation, leading to uprisings like the Battle for Seattle (Figure 3.11) in 1999, when "the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle galvanized a group of independent journalists who seek to counter the high-level negotiations with the power of grassroots communication" (Bodzin, 1999). This event represented a significant moment in the intersection of activism and technology, anticipating the role that ICTs would play in future social movements and protests.

3.2.2 The Impact of Social Media on Collective Action

As anticipated in previous sections, online social connections, facilitated by social media platforms, have revolutionised knowledge exchange. These platforms, characterised by speed and global connectivity, enable fast-paced dialogues blurring the lines between physical and virtual worlds. These virtual spaces eliminate geographical distances, encouraging the formation of communities with no race, religion, or gender bias.

In essence, social media, including platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, refer to internet-accessed communication tools that offer diverse functions, such as comments, chat, groups, and hyperlinks, and actions, like sharing, commenting, and liking content. Through these features, they support a many-to-many communication model, enabling interactions with broad audiences, as opposed to one-to-one or one-to-many paradigms seen in mainstream media (Cammaerts, 2015). Despite the role of social media in the contemporary communication landscape, finding a consensus on a common definition of social media has been challenging in literature due to the evolving nature of these platforms. Carr and Hayes (2015) interpret social media as Internet-based channels enabling users to interact and self-present with local and global audiences through UGC. According to this definition, the value of social media lies in user interaction, distinguishing it from traditional media where value is based on the identity of the individual creating or sharing the content. Although the accessibility of social media potentially allows everyone to voice their opinion, it also raises social and ethical concerns, as access remains restricted for low-income individuals, contradicting digital platforms' ideal of universal free speech.

The internet's rapid evolution has hence expanded global access and enhanced real-time communication. Initially relying on text, it now supports various formats and interactive features.

Social media, acting as convergent technologies, combine these diverse forms of communication on a single platform, blurring the lines between public and private communication. Addressing this shift, Camp and Chien (2000) have identified five dualities inherent in the Internet, affirming the coexistence of:

→ **public and private spaces**;

→ **global and local interactions**;

→ **trans-lingual and cross-culture experiences**, referred to the property of the Web to contain various languages and cultures;

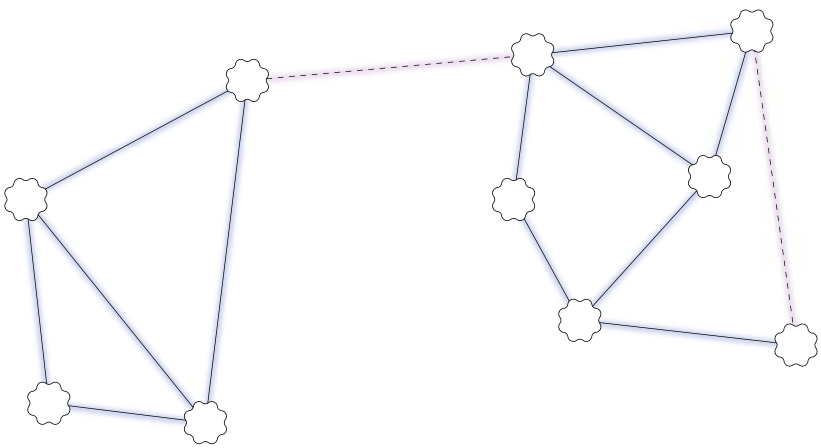
→ **connection to the non-public**, as the incorporation of private functionalities on businesses' websites;

→ **control and/vs freedom,** as users seek a balance between unlimited information access and a secure digital environment.

This conceptual framework reflects the multifaceted nature of the internet, highlighting its role in shaping contemporary communication and social interactions. The coexistence of public and private spaces, global and local interactions, and trans-lingual, cross-culture experiences illustrates the Internet's capacity to connect people across diverse contexts, while the connection to the non-public emphasises the Internet's role in facilitating private interactions within public spaces.

The shift in online interactions, where users intentionally share information with strangers and feel a sense of belonging, amplifies 'weak ties', offering a unique environment for knowledge exchange. According to Granovetter (1973), these refer to connections with people who may be acquaintances or even strangers, in contrast with 'strong ties', which involve regular and more intimate interactions, referring to relationships with family members, close friends, or work colleagues. In the past, weak ties were easily broken, but the advent of the internet and social networks have turned them into longer-term connections. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok enable users to follow and be followed by individuals they may never have seen face to face, while Facebook allows them to maintain connections efficiently. Generally, these platforms contribute to building broader networks of friends or followers, accentuating the strength found in weak ties (Figure 3.12).

→ **Figure 3.12** The Strength of Weak Ties (Granovetter, 1973).



The broad reach implicit in weak ties is further emphasised by the so-called 'spill-over effect', a form of peer-to-peer sharing that occurs when a user's engagement with content increases its visibility to its followers, creating a chain of increased reach. However, this spill-over effect can also contribute to the rapid spread of misinformation, reducing diversity in content and creating echo chambers and polarisation, due to the nature of social media algorithms. As content circulates through weak ties, there is a risk of unchecked information dissemination. This point can be illustrated by the scandal surrounding Balenciaga's "Giftshop" campaign in 2022, which, as described in Appendix A, featured kids holding teddy bears in provocative poses. As the images from the campaign spread, the initial criticism escalated into conspiracy accusations claiming the brand's association with powerful Satanist groups. This misinformation spread widely, intertwining with QAnon theories and linking the brand to unrelated scandals, showcasing the potential for the 'spill-over effect' to foster echo chambers and polarization across different ideological spectrums.

The Internet, ICTs, and social media have transformed communication for activists, providing accessible ways to mobilise and disseminate information. Initially serving as a means to distribute information globally, and breaking geographical boundaries, the internet has evolved into a crucial tool for activists to amplify offline protests and engage people in new ways. Historical movements like the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movement highlighted the transformative potential of ICTs and networked communication in expanding citizen engagement and political influence. This process has further accelerated in more recent times, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic prompted many to shift to these platforms for information consumption. Today, social media represent crucial spaces for expressing support for social and political causes, organising protests, shaping news narratives, and influencing public agendas.

A comprehensive understanding of social media is essential for activists to use these platforms effectively. Here, a list of some of the most common social media platforms is introduced, highlighting their main functions in supporting activism:

→ **Instagram** serves as a platform for sharing visuals in different forms, including individual photos and videos, short videos ('reels'), and ephemeral content. Its design emphasises visual content creation and dissemination, distinguishing it from text-focused platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and standing out for its feature of emotion detection in images and videos. Given this focus, it enables real-time, cost-free, and globally accessible documentation of social movement events.

→ **Twitter**, designed for real-time communication, uses short texts (with a 280-character limit) and hashtags for topic-based conversations. Its 'retweet' tool is fundamental in facilitating the widespread sharing of public messages, extending the reach of relevant information.

→ **Facebook**, with diverse functions like written posts, varied content uploads, and external link sharing, supports collective action. Its 'fan page' and 'events' tools represent important features for organising social movements. While Twitter emphasises broad connections with strangers, Facebook's strength lies in mobilisation through users' social networks.

→ **TikTok**, a multimedia platform, enables users to share short-form videos. Its format supports creative expression and quick dissemination of content, standing out for its emphasis

on UGC, viral content, and broad reach. These make it a unique tool for expressing ideas, enhancing the effectiveness of social movements in connecting with diverse audiences and contributing to cultural trends.

→ **YouTube** is a video-sharing platform that enables users to upload, share, and view videos. It serves as a hub for a vast range of content, including documentaries, vlogs, educational videos, and entertainment, providing a platform for activists to share information, discuss issues, and build communities around various topics. Its long-format videos make it a prominent tool for providing in-depth explanations, personal testimonials, and extensive event coverage.

→ **Weibo**, a Chinese microblogging platform combining elements from Twitter and Facebook, offers users the ability to share concise messages, images, and videos. With features like hashtags, it supports real-time communication, content sharing, and community building, making it influential in shaping public opinion and supporting activism in China.

This intersection of ICTs and activist practices has given rise to the concept of 'digital activism', also referred to as 'cyberactivism', a form of activism that uses the Internet and digital media as platforms for collective mobilisation and political action. While there is no agreed definition of digital activism among scholars and activists, Özkula (2021) suggests defining it based on its practices. Conversely, attributing it solely to the use of specific technologies would result in technological determinism. A definition that emphasises practices, objectives, and actors is that provided by Karatzogianni (2015), who describes digital activism as a process involving non-state actors, like social movements, organisations, and individuals from civil society, who operate beyond government and corporate influence, striving for political reform or revolution.

These technologies have offered new paths for social movements to directly participate in online social and political actions, with deep impacts on the structure and effectiveness of activist movements. This shift is characterised by a transformation of their organisational dynamics, with reduced reliance on professional leadership in favour of grassroots and collective behaviour. These decentralised structures led to the emergence of new forms of democracy and participation, with digital technology serving as the infrastructure. The levels of audience involvement and participation within activist contexts can be categorized according to five levels:

→ **1. Connecting**: passive engagement from activists, who mainly search for information.
→ **2. Sharing**: actively disseminating information within the network or organisation.

→ **3. Commenting**: sharing opinions and comments about campaigns, whether in media coverage or on social networks.

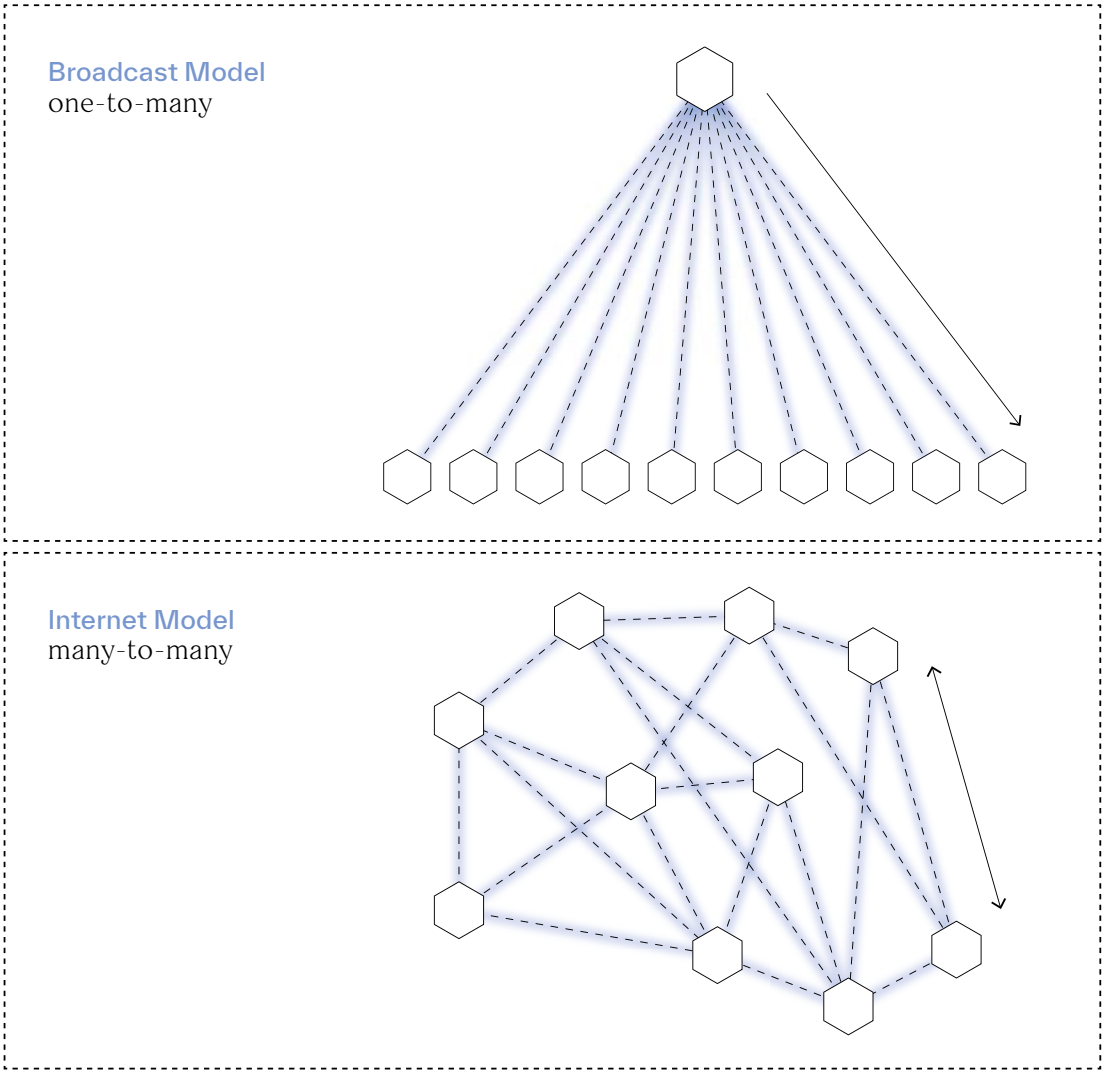
→ **4. Participating**: engagement in campaign actions like contacting media or public representatives, signing petitions, or taking part in street demonstrations.

→ **5. Collaborating**: co-creation of content, with activists contributing their own materials to the organisation.

In this collaborative environment, the use of digital technology is influenced by economic, social, and political factors. The social context both shapes and is shaped by the

↓ **Figure 3.13** Broadcast vs Internet Model.

digital landscape, with activism being rooted in causes in which people feel a sense of belonging. To describe the social changes driven by information technologies, Castells (2009) introduced the term 'network society' (Figure 3.13), capturing the idea of a social structure composed of networks driven by ICTs.



A key aspect of this transformation is the emergence of a new form of communication known as 'mass self-communication', which differs from one-way traditional mass communication, resulting in horizontal and interactive networks that reach global audiences. It is self-directed, often initiated by individuals or groups independently of the traditional media system, and self-selected in reception as users communicate with one another. While the medium itself does not determine the content and effects of messages, it facilitates diverse and autonomous communication flows, constantly constructing public meaning. The possibility of decentralising flows of information has shifted control from mainstream media to individuals, allowing them to become message makers and narrate their experiences, whereas activism was once an attempt to seek media attention from the press. Today, social media activism plays a role in transferring unconventional political narratives in ICT domains, also serving as a source of healing for marginalised communities, creating links among people who previously had limited means to express themselves and allowing them to share and recover from oppression and trauma. As a result, it appears that the power of intertwining citizen journalism and social media activism lies in the opportunity to offer more empathetic narratives able to trigger people emotionally.

Emotions, especially positive ones, are considered essential for mobilising and sustaining participation in activism, as they encourage repeated engagement and can trigger a rapid spread of online sentiment. The concept of 'affective publics' introduced by Papacharissi (2014) refers to networked communities driven by emotional expression, often forming around shared topics of interest, and using tools like hashtags. Such affective publics are particularly evident on platforms like TikTok, which thrives on virality. Tiktok's affordances have led to innovative forms of activism, enabling non-expert users to become influential and visible voices. For instance, climate activists have created an atmosphere of shared concern around environmental topics, while several minority groups have engaged with 'playful activism' to raise awareness about serious topics such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A similar example in the fashion domain is illustrated by the controversy surrounding Brandy Melville, its exclusive sizing policy and lack of diversity, where emotions, personal storytelling, and humour played an important role in driving activism. The scandal, as described in Appendix A, mostly unfolded on TikTok through short-form videos and targeted a Gen Z audience, whose sensitivity and communication style rely on humour and playfulness to address social challenges. The emotional depth and relatability conveyed through personal narratives encouraged dialogue and established a strong connection between the audience and the topic, resulting in deeper advocacy efforts. These cases demonstrate how using creative micro-videos, TikTok activism provides a platform for creating alternative narratives to dominant discourses and increasing the visibility of underrepresented groups. It offers the youth an opportunity to engage in political and civic discussions in an educational, entertaining, and peer-to-peer format.

By relying on emotional community-building, this bottom-up approach to communication has facilitated rebellion against institutionalised power relations, for example via real-time footage of brutality and discrimination. Promoting connections among audiences of diverse races, genders, or classes, hyperconnectivity presents stories and content able to emotionally impact individuals who may not belong to one's primary audience. Being rooted in emotions and empathy, these dynamics ultimately foster equality. In recent history, this has been especially crucial for building pressure on oppressive governments, taking advantage of the lack of geographical boundaries of digital platforms, as exemplified by the 2011 Arab Spring. During this case, various digital activism tools and actions were employed, including social media campaigns and hashtags (#). These methods proved to be powerful tools for mobilisation in a region with limited freedom of speech and a high degree of public control, playing a crucial role in organising protests and spreading information across the Middle East and North Africa. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook facilitated interactions and coordination among protesters, while hashtags such as #ArabSpring and #Jan25 (Figure 3.14) spread global awareness and allowed the documentation of events. Recognising the impact of these platforms, the Egyptian government took the extreme measure of shutting down internet traffic in an attempt to suppress the movement and control the flow of information (Richtel, 2011). Since then, this form of digital protest, sustained by social media and hashtags, has gained further prominence, showcasing the evolving landscape of activism in the digital age.

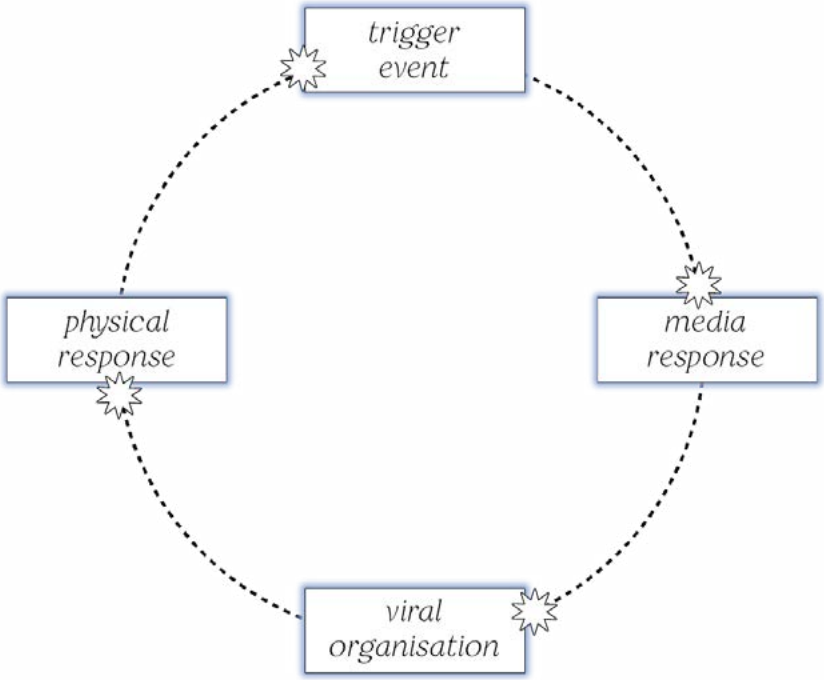
The Arab Spring also emerges as a powerful example of the effectiveness of a specific form of digital activism, the so-called 'hashtag activism'. Hashtag activism involves supporting a cause with minimal actions such as sharing, liking, or retweeting posts related to the cause, and relies on the use of hashtags to reach

→ **Figure 3.14** Man holding a poster reading "Facebook, #jan25, The Egyptian Social Network" during the 2011 Arab Spring protests.

↘ **Figure 3.15** Alyssa Milano's #MeToo tweet, a significant moment in the movement against sexual harassment and assault, symbolizing the power of social media in raising awareness.

a broad audience and amplify messages. Examples of hashtag activism include #BringBackOurGirls, #YesAllWomen, and #MeToo. The latter, initiated by activist Tarana Burke, gained global attention after actress Alyssa Milano encouraged victims of sexual abuse to tweet #MeToo in response to the Harvey Weinstein scandal (Figure 3.15). The campaign went viral, with millions of posts on Twitter and Facebook successfully demonstrating the magnitude of the issue. The effectiveness of hashtag activism lies in supporting the formation of communities around topics of interest and clustering individuals with similar mindsets and values, a process which is further enhanced by social media algorithms. By encouraging community building, platforms like Twitter, which is highly hashtag-based, have witnessed exponential growth in addressing social issues, allowing unrepresented voices to be heard. Trending hashtags hold fundamental power, as they can be noted even by people who are unfamiliar with the topics, therefore shaping broader conversations in media and politics. As a result, hashtag activism often manages to extend beyond virtual spaces to impact activism in physical settings.

To expand this examination of the digital activism process, a second conceptual model can be introduced. The framework (Figure 3.16) developed by Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014) outlines the evolution of protests using social media technologies, based on four cyclical stages, referring to the adaptive nature of collective action to new contexts and media.



→ **Figure 3.16** Model for political movements using social media (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014, p. 370).

The four steps include:

→ **1. Triggering event**: this stage involves an extraordinary incident, a 'detonating factor', which determines a social reaction. This is crucial for creating a political opportunity, catalysed by social media, which empowers marginalised individuals and allies to organise and join protests. For example, the Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh in 2013 exposed the harsh working conditions within the fashion industry, triggering the birth of the Fashion Revolution movement.

→ **2. Traditional media response**: the triggering factor prompts an immediate response, with social media amplifying and accelerating information dissemination. Online spaces enable citizens to share, collaborate, and cooperate, providing an alternative platform for political interaction, especially as they are less affected by censorship or limitations imposed by the government compared to traditional media. In the case of the Rana Plaza tragedy, traditional media outlets extensively covered the case, bringing it to the attention of public consciousness.

→ **3. Viral organisation**: once a group successfully generates a mass reaction, they begin building an online community with shared language and ideals. The decentralised organisation becomes viral, influencing both online and offline mobilisation. In response to the media coverage of the Rana Plaza case, activists created an online community around the viral campaign "Who made my clothes?" launched by Fashion Revolution.

→ **4. Physical response**: this stage sees the manifestation of the protest in the physical world, demonstrating the power and strength of the social movement on the streets. For example, the online #whomademyclothes movement translated into physical actions such as the annual Fashion Revolution Weeks, where people around the world participate in events, protests, and panel discussions to raise awareness about ethical fashion. Additionally, physical responses include consumers demanding transparency from fashion brands, participating in clothing swaps, and choosing to support sustainable and ethical fashion alternatives.

The model proposes a comprehensive view of social media movements' development and the dynamic nature of collecting

action, emphasising the complementary relationship between online and offline efforts. Through the example of the Fashion Revolution movement, it becomes evident how triggering events, media responses, viral organisation, and physical responses collectively shape the evolution of social movements in the digital age.

While social media has certainly revolutionized the way social movements develop and mobilize, this has not happened without challenges. In the next section, some of the potential issues that social media activism faces will be addressed. From performative activism to the spread of misinformation, several obstacles must be overcome to ensure that social media activism remains a powerful tool for creating positive social change.

3.2.3 Challenges and Limitations in Contemporary Activism

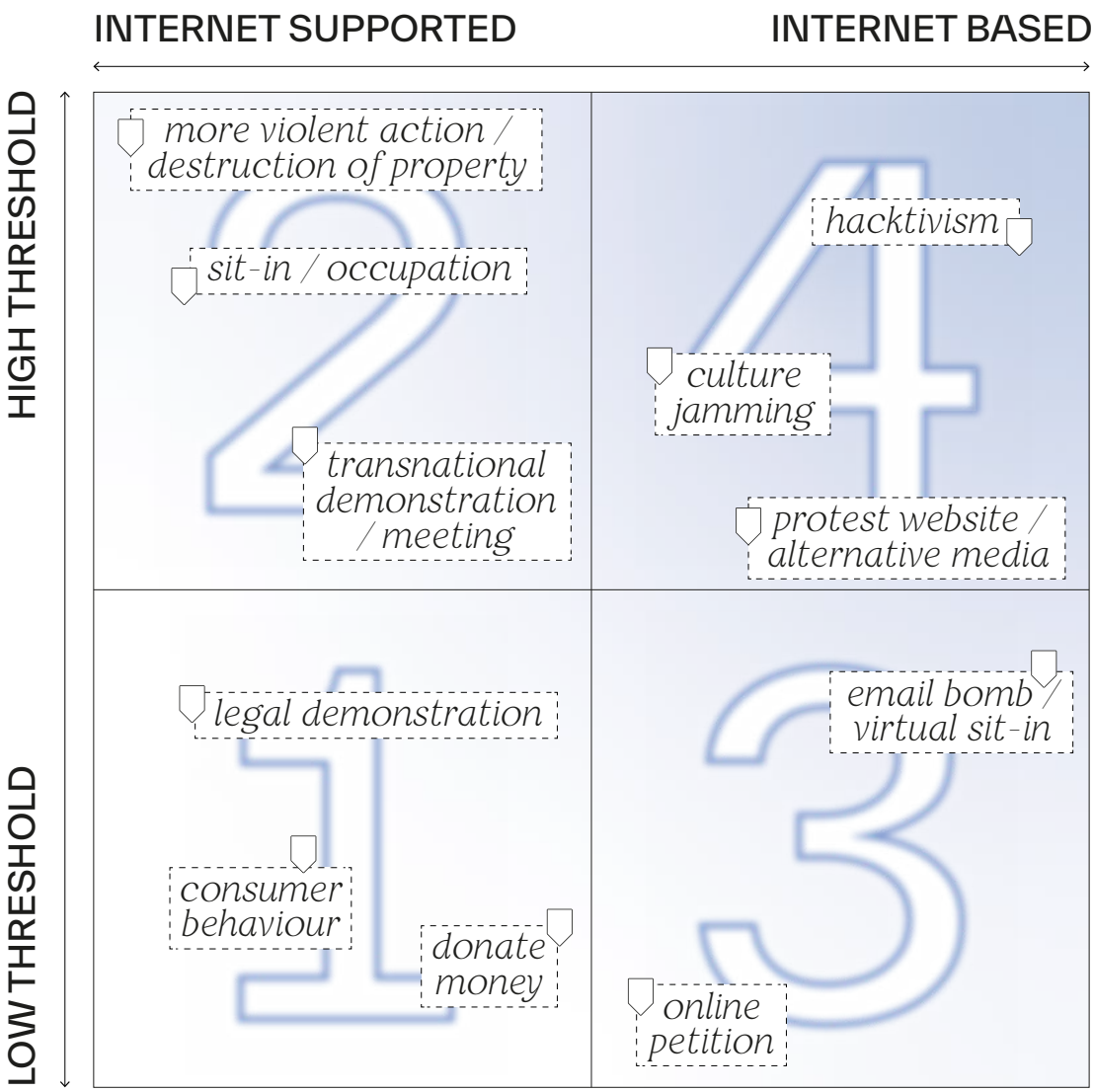
To better navigate the dynamic realm of digital activism, this section will explore the difficulties that activists encounter when engaging in activism on social media platforms. Some of the most frequently addressed obstacles and risks in literature include the limitations of playful activism, the lack of transparency in algorithmic processes, the role of censorship and hate speech, and performative activism.

The Internet is commonly seen as a tool that manages to quickly gather support for actions, but it can be argued that a decline in support can be just as fast. This is due to social media's inability to establish trust and strong connections essential for building a strong activist base, despite its potential to attract a large audience. However, these less intimate connections, which we previously examined under the idea of 'weak ties', still hold significance in the creation of interconnected networks. For activist movements, the power of weak ties is not to be found in emotional support, but in their ability to expand networks and increase opportunities for organising action. According to Cammaerts (2015, p. 6),

"weak ties are often seen as primarily instrumental, strong ties are seen as being emotional and as leading to more frequent exchanges and interactions. The strength of weak ties is understood to lie in the ability of individuals and organisations to draw support from weak-tie networks in the form of experience, information and resources. The strength of strong ties tends to be emphasized in the social movement literature and is associated with strong motivation and loyalty".

In contrast to strong ties, associated with emotional depth, weak ties frequently raise questions about their efficacy in driving meaningful social change. The challenge lies in transforming weak ties from simple means for conducting information into paths towards genuine, impactful activism. Individuals may share causes within their online networks through easily executable actions. While this allows for the rapid spread of information, it does not guarantee a depth of engagement and actual influence on social change.

These concerns hold even more value when considering that social media platforms, where weak ties often thrive, are common spaces for 'slacktivist' actions. The notion of 'slacktivism' is often addressed in negative terms. Although some interpret it as an accessible form of activism, it is often seen as a less effective protest in addressing real-world issues compared to traditional participation (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). The term is typically used to describe low-effort activities like liking, retweeting, or signing petitions that may not lead to substantial engagement. This criticism creates a distinction between online and offline efforts, considering online action as something which is easily performed but less impactful, hence emphasising visibility



↑ **Figure 3.17** A typology of a new digitised action repertoire. The graph proposes four quadrants where forms of activism are differentiated between high or low effort, and Internet-supported or Internet-based (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010).

over real action. According to skeptics, digital activism should rather be regarded as an initial step towards substantial forms of activism and meaningful discussions in the offline domain.

Considering the risky dichotomy between online and offline actions, a possible suggestion to understand both opportunities and limitations introduced by the use of the internet to social movements is Van Laer and Van Aelst's (2010, p. 4) "typology of a new digitalized action repertoire" (Figure 3.17). The model, based on four quadrants, distinguishing between actions facilitated by the internet and actions that are exclusive to it. To this end, the repertoire integrates both traditional tools enhanced by the internet and more contemporary online strategies, allowing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic landscape of social actions in the digital context. The typology is based on two dimensions, respectively 'internet-supported versus internet-based', and 'low versus high thresholds'.

In Dimension 1, the authors differentiate between Internet-based actions, made possible only by the Internet, and Internet-supported ones, which use digital technologies as a means to enhance traditional tools. This dimension explores the capacity of the internet to extend available tools for social movements, demonstrating that

"the shift towards new internet-based actions and tactics relying on the internet has not resulted in the replacement of the old action forms, but rather complemented them" (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010, p. 6).

On the other hand, Dimension 2 introduces the concept of a 'hierarchy of participation', suggesting that some actions require higher effort and risks than others, and establishing a spectrum of thresholds for participation in terms of cost and ideology. For example, low-threshold actions like signing petitions or hashtag activism require minimal commitment, while high-threshold actions like street demonstrations demand time, expenses, and potential confrontation with authorities.

By delineating these four quadrants, the authors contribute to understanding the complexity of contemporary digital activism, especially concerning its fluid and dynamic nature based on the constant evolution of tools and technologies. Precisely from considering this dynamic evolution, a second criticism emerges in literature. While early digital activism focused on the formation of a collective identity, contemporary movements like #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #FridaysForFuture have raised questions about their true emancipatory potential. This scepticism arises from concerns about commercial interests guiding contemporary digital spaces, which do not guarantee equal visibility of content (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023).

In the 2010s, online communication shifted from social networks to social media platforms. These platforms, which serve as intermediaries with third parties, process user-generated data and guide the behaviour of users through automated processes. To participate in online discourse, users now must adhere to platform-specific communication logic, which is dictated by algorithmic design. This poses potential issues as the algorithmic design is shaped by neoliberal interests and often lacks transparency for users and regulators (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). These developments have complicated activist practices, while at the same time facilitating the dissemination of content by actors with substantial economic resources, such as governments, political parties, and brands. This interplay between technology, activism, and corporate interests in the digital age challenges the grassroots nature of activism, raising important questions about digital activism's effectiveness and potential limitations. According to Castillo-Esparcia et al. (2023), commercialisation of social media visibility represents in fact one of the key challenges in this domain. The shift to social media platforms driven by commercial interests has given more influence to corporations, governments, and well-funded movements gaining more influence, with risks for citizens and activists to be made invisible by algorithms. This makes it essential to ensure transparency in algorithmic operations and explore measures to limit the commercialisation of visibility. An example of this growing challenge is represented by the decision made by Twitter to turn their old identity verification system (the blue check) into a paid service for promoting user tweets visibility.

Furthermore, algorithmic marketing may limit the visibility of activists or even fail to protect them from harassment, despite the existence of content moderation strategies. These practices have laid the ground for hate speech, driving activists, particularly women, to leave these mainstream platforms. Also, those who expose abuses often face censorship. According to Castillo-Esparcia, Almansa-Martínez, and Caro-Castaño (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023), this issue should involve governments, beyond relying on self-regulation by corporations, which has proven insufficient.

Another risk addressed by the authors concerns the growth of playful activism, analysed in previous sections. Indeed, this phenomenon, where users engage in politically charged

↗ **Figure 3.18** Stills from video by TikTok user @anisyahpy_ interpreting the "A'atuna Al Toufoule" ("Give Us the Childhood") trending lypsinc. On Tiktok, this format involves engaging in lip-syncing and makeup application, transforming faces into canvases for recontextualizing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The video is a powerful example of playful activism and visual storytelling in support of the Palestinian cause, incorporating the hashtag #freepalestine. Below, the QR code to the video is included.

discussions with a lighter attitude, comes with its limitations. Especially in the case of TikTok, adapting to the medium's features has led activism to rely on entertainment formats. While this approach is effective in raising awareness and mobilising a broad and younger audience, there is a need for less superficial forms of activism that allow deeper reflection and more user control. This is the case for trending hashtags like #freepalestine (Figure 3.18), which, despite bringing attention to the topic and amplifying marginalised voices, resulted in limited impact and a lack of real mobilisation. In the digital space, non-linear aesthetics enhance the performative aspect through trends and emotional engagement. This represents a form of detachment from participation, differing from civic engagement.

The potential lack of depth is also addressed when discussing performative activism, a type of participation in public discourse particularly practised on social media platforms. It involves sharing informative posts on current issues, usually related to social justice. This form of activism, while contributing to the amplification of certain conversations, is condemned for its individualistic nature and potential misuse for commercial purposes, which challenge genuine activism. This first aspect is related to the idea that participation in activist campaigns can serve as a means for individuals to express and validate their online identities, overshadowing collective efforts in favour of self-expression and personal branding, and outweighing the voices of those directly affected by social issues. Similar instances occurred with the #BlackLivesMatter movement when highly visible white influencers shifted the focus away from the communities directly impacted by racial injustice, and with the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo hashtag, initially started by activist Tarana Burke to support black women in dealing with sexual violence, went viral when posted by actress Alyssa Milano. Ultimately, this rise in popularity unintentionally led to the exclusion of women of colour from public debate on the topic.

On the other hand, performative activism is often exploited by digital marketing in an attempt to align with social causes to reach specific communities. A common example is corporate 'rainbow-washing', related to the use of LGBTQ+ references and symbols for marketing and PR purposes, and not driven by genuine commitment to the cause, visible in practices like the

integration of the rainbow flag in companies' logos during Pride Month. Within the landscape of performative activism and the challenges faced in social media activism, the examination of brands' role becomes crucial. In an interview with Kozinets, Jenkins (2022) highlights the need for brands to avoid superficial gestures and understand the diverse voices within consumer activism, drawing insights from several cases. For example, the Harry Potter fandom demonstrated its influence on corporate practices when fans advocated against Warner Communication's use of non-fair-trade chocolate at their theme park. Through petitions and social media campaigns, these fans obtained support from author J.K. Rowling, prompting Warner to change its approach (Figure 3.19). However, another instance of consumer activism within the Harry Potter community reveals the nuanced relationship between fans and the brands they admire. This time, J.K. Rowling's controversial comments on transgender and non-binary individuals led to a shift in fan sentiment, demonstrating the dual nature of fan engagement - advocating for positive change in one scenario and expressing dissent in response to a creator's views in another.

To sum up, social media provides both opportunities and challenges for digital activism. While the Internet has the potential to gather support for activist causes and create weak ties that expand networks and increase opportunities for organising action, it also faces limitations such as the lack of strong connections essential for building a strong activist base. Online activism has been criticised for its low-effort activities that may not lead to substantial engagement, but it could also serve as an initial step towards substantial forms of activism, considering the complementary nature of traditional and online tools for activism. Despite these challenges, digital activism continues to have an impact on social change, offering unprecedented possibilities for collective action. However, to ensure a real impact, activists and movements must navigate the potential risks of their practices.


The Daily Prophet

THE WIZARD WORLD'S BEGUILING BROADSHEET OF CHOICE

EXCLUSIVE

WIZARDS WIN!

JK ROWLING & FAN ACTIVISTS SCORE UNPRECEDENTED VICTORY AGAINST CHILD SLAVERY

FAN ACTIVISM JUST LANDED A MAJOR VICTORY. WARNER BROS. IS MOVING FORWARD WITH PLANS TO MAKE ALL HARRY POTTER CHOCOLATE SOLD AT WARNER BROS. OUTLETS AND THROUGH THEIR LICENSED PARTNERS 100% UTZ OR FAIRTRADE. THIS ANNOUNCEMENT CULMINATES A FOUR YEAR, FAN-LED EFFORT BY THE HARRY POTTER ALLIANCE.

→ **Figure 3.19** The fictional The Daily Prophet newspaper from the Harry Potter series celebrates the real-life success of the "Not in Harry's Name" campaign. The campaign was promoted by The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) to pressure Warner Brothers towards transparency in the production of Harry Potter chocolate goods and promote the use of Fair Trade certified products.

3.3 The Activist Role of Designers in the Digital Age

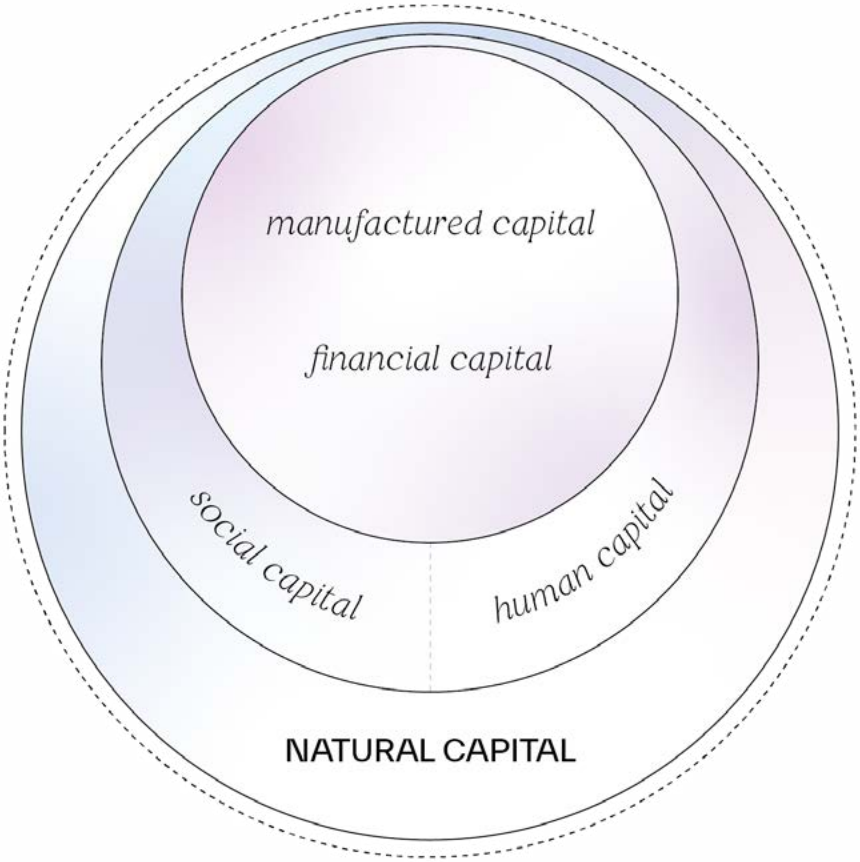
Thus far, the research has investigated the role of activism in instigating societal changes and constructing the future of societies with the support of evolving technologies. According to Poshar (2019), activists, through tangible expressions like meetings, publications, and demonstrations, are challenged to continuously evolve their visual communication methods. Similarly, Umberto Eco (1976) noted a shift in achieving political empowerment over time: while gaining influence used to involve intervention in the army and politics, in today's context it requires intervention through the media, due to their ability to shape public opinion. Eco (1976) emphasises that media activism involves repurposing mass media to create alternative forms of thinking, resisting the hierarchical control imposed by mainstream media. The purpose of media activism is to allow meaning to emerge bottom-up, challenging the dominance of mainstream corporations. This is represented by Eco's (Eco, 1976) concept of 'semiological guerrilla warfare', which describes the development of complementary communication systems against the dominant culture. This semiological guerrilla warfare, or media activism, is conveyed through alternative mediums over which the dominant culture has no control, such as streets and billboards. Today, these serve as channels for media activism, as they complement massive and technological communication. Based on these premises, the role of designers emerges as crucial in developing alternative means of communication within social movements.

3.3.1 Maximising the Impact of Activism: The Five Capitals Model

A significant contribution to research on the relationship between design and activism is represented by Fuad-Luke's (2009) work "Design Activism: Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World", which emphasises the crucial intersection between design practices and broader societal and environmental concerns. At the core of his approach is the "Five Capitals" framework developed by the Forum for the Future (Porritt, 2007), which serves as a comprehensive model for integrating sustainability into design processes. The concept of capital provides a useful perspective for understanding how activism operates to effect a change in the status quo. Activism functions on various forms of capital, which together contribute to the global concept of 'capitalism' that is prevalent in economic and political ideologies.

In a time where the consequences of design have an impact on a global scale, the author stresses the need for a socially and environmentally conscious design philosophy. By addressing the framework, his approach considers the complex relationships between natural resources, cultural values, human well-being, social cohesion, and economic considerations. The analysis of the framework becomes a first step towards an era of design that aligns with the values of sustainability and social justice.

The "Five Capitals" model (Figure 3.20) provides a basis for comprehending sustainability in the context of wealth creation or 'capital' from an economic perspective. Any business or organisation uses five types of capital - natural, human, social, manufactured, and financial - to provide its products and services, with sustainable organisations striving to preserve or augment these assets rather than deteriorating them. This framework enables businesses to consider how broader environmental and social issues can affect financial sustainability and provides a guide to maximise the value of each capital, leading to more sustainable outcomes.



Natural capital is the foundation of all other forms of capital, including human capital, which is inherent in each individual. Social, manufactured, and financial capitals are derived from these two primary forms. Additionally, man-made goods, cultural, and symbolic capitals are also significant, especially in relation to design, which plays a key role in managing their flow. Activism has the power to influence the perception and quality of these capitals, especially those that are socially oriented – social, cultural, human, and institutional – which are central to social and political change. Considering the term 'political' regarding a broader societal dialogue about the kind of society we wish to live in, and given that design is intrinsic to this question, all design can be considered political (Fuad-Luke, 2009).

Activism can either enhance or reduce the value of the five capitals, depending on its objectives. In recent interpretations, human capital has been expanded to include physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects, related to shared meanings and values, which are crucial to achieve sustainability in society. Activism, challenging existing norms and proposing new ones, embodies

"a sense of developing the spiritual capacity of individual human capital, that is collectivized in social capital" (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. 10).

↗ **Figure 3.20** The Five Capitals Framework, developed by the Forum for the Future (Porritt, 2007), and addressed by Fuad-Luke (2009).

In essence, design and activism share a common goal of enhancing life and creating a better society. The rise of 'design activism' has emerged in response to the growing need for social change, leading to the formation of various design networks and groups dedicated to addressing social, economic, and environmental issues. With many pressing concerns remaining unresolved by current systems, there is a growing interest in social innovation to find new solutions to address them. Regarding this, design activism affirms the role of design in effecting systemic change through interventions, using design thinking and tools to achieve long-term impact rather than offering short-term solutions in the form of products. In

addressing social concerns, provocative design methods are employed to challenge the status quo, evoke emotions, raise awareness, and stimulate critical thinking (Fuad-Luke, 2009).

3.3.2 The Rise of Design Activism

As mentioned, design inherently communicates values and models, making it inherently political. Indeed, designers are increasingly aware of the socio-political dimensions of their projects, especially regarding inclusivity in societal discourse. Within the realm of design activism, there is a growing intersection between civic engagement and sustainability, with the creation of counter-narratives and the proposal of alternative futures.

Unlike traditional design approaches, design aimed at activism raises questions, using tools from visual communication, social practices, and political organisations. In our technology-driven era, the pervasive use of digital platforms creates a 'surveillance capitalism' scenario, where data and algorithms can potentially transform these platforms into social guardians. This context provides designers with a new role, that of unifying our constant digital dialogue and creating visions that bring together diverse ideas, groups, opinions, and challenges. Designers can become catalysts for collective design and activism by building communities. This is especially true given the increasing complexity of the contemporary political communication landscape, where the rise of disinformation, marked by the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories, represents a major issue. The ability of designers to create coherent narratives and tools makes them central figures in countering the pervasive nature of disinformation in the social discourse (Bennett & Livingston, 2020). As pointed out, design activism goes beyond public demonstrations, it is an intervention into people's lives, using visual communication to amplify overlooked voices (Markussen, 2013). Designers, as active agents, contribute to creating alternative ways of shaping culture, emerging as essential figures in culturally organising social movements. As Poshar (2019, p. 7) states,

"within activism movements, designers are active agents / actors with a particular cultural capital and technical knowledge that is capable of not only producing, shaping and building services or goods, but also able to re-produce, re-/build and re-/shape a culture by improving its methods, practices and tools of communication".

This affirms the unique cultural capital and technical knowledge that designers introduce within activist movements, playing a fundamental role in generating and disseminating culture, a complex task for other professionals in activism. Beyond producing impactful visuals and communicative structures, designers' skills include conceptualising intricate problems, lateral and creative thinking, and effective communication. To this end, engaging in graphic dissent involves breaking established design norms to align with social causes, triggering thought and discussion. Among other powerful examples, protest posters, whether used in demonstrations, on walls, or online, serve as a voice for marginalised perspectives. For instance, the Occupy Movement originated with a poster (Figure 3.21) featured in a magazine, depicting a ballerina above the Charging Bull of Wall Street. This visual served as a call to action for American citizens to collectively advocate for reforms in sociopolitical and global economic domains. After the movement, the global Occupy Design network was born as a virtual space to gather designers in discussions about their role in activism and to share open-source work. For them, activist designers play a crucial role in addressing systemic crises and revealing problems for collective action, operating not only as activists but also as cultural organisers.

↑ **Figure 3.21** Poster by Will Brown for Adbusters, 2011. The image became the icon for the Occupy Wall Street Movement, advocating against financial inequality worldwide.

↗ **Figure 3.22** Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) poster by Hilda Dallas, 1909.

→ **Figure 3.23** Alexander Rodchenko, Books (Please)! advertising poster, 1924.

→ **Figure 3.24** Aleksandr Rodchenko, Self-portrait with poster for Battleship Potemkin, 1925.

Despite the significance of the relationship between design and activism, Fuad-Luke (2009) addresses the lack of attention given to activism in design disciplines, except for architecture and graphic design, which have a history of involvement in social and political discourse. The interest in graphic design activism can be traced back to the 1860s suffragette movement (Figure 3.22) and persists in the present day, with examples of design-led activism shown throughout this period. Examples like Aleksander Rodchenko (Figure 3.23, Figrue 3.24) demonstrate the historical engagement of graphic designers in social causes (Poshar, 2019). He exemplifies how political upheaval during the Russian Revolution of 1917 influenced his versatile artistic career, from his focus on painting and graphic design to his pioneering work in photomontage and photography. His socially engaged and innovative approach showed through powerful political images and intimate portraits of the working class, depicting how activism can inspire creativity and a new aesthetic. Rodchenko's attitude has been shared by a multitude of designers throughout history, with many refusing to contribute to mainstream culture amidst global crises.

However, the activism landscape reveals a wider territory where designers can operate, making significant contributions to socio-cultural and political change by intentionally or unintentionally using design, design thinking, and other design processes.

Such activism may involve professional designers commissioned by organisations and individuals or the use of design thinking by non-professional designers in the same organisations. Concerning this, Fuad-Luke (2009) traces a distinction between 'design-orientated activism', emanating from traditional activist organisations, and 'design-led activism', referring to instances in which designers use design to address an activist issue or cause.

Focusing on 'design-led activism', the author presents a preliminary definition of design activism, intended as


ЛЕНГИЗ
КНИГИ
ПО ВСЕМ ОТРАСЛЯМ ЗНАНИЯ
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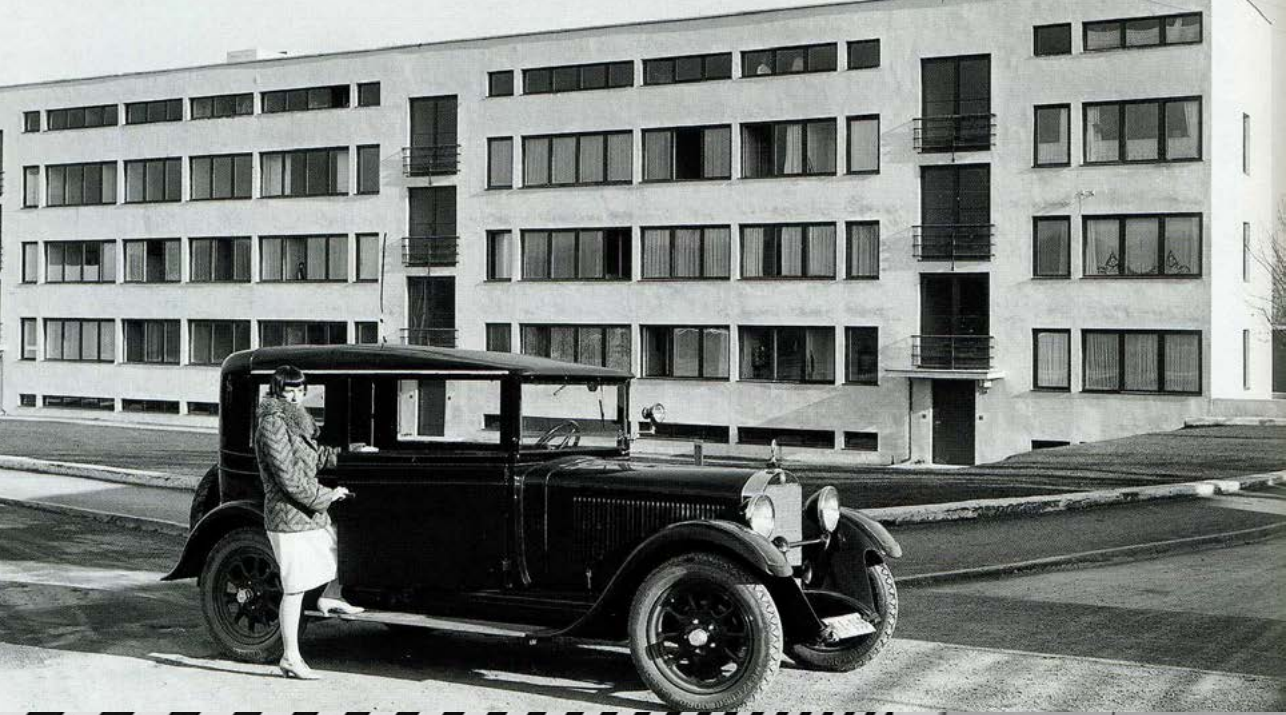
БРОНЕНОСЕЦ ПОТЕМКИН



"design thinking, imagination and practice applied knowingly or unknowingly to create a counter-narrative aimed at generating and balancing positive social, institutional, environmental and/or economic change" (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. 27).

← **Figure 3.25** Die Weissenhofsiedlung, Mies van der Rohe's social housing in Stuttgart, Germany, 1927.

↙ **Figure 3.26** Superonda, Archizoom Associati, 1967.

↙ **Figure 3.27** Architettura Nascosta, Superstudio, 1970. Picture by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia.

This interpretation emphasises the idea of counter-narrative to promote positive change, differing from mainstream narratives agreed upon by society and commonly accepted behaviour. The author highlights the fundamental role of design thinking, imagination, and practice in achieving this goal.

The author goes on to analyse how design activism is intertwined with the broader history of design, acting as a mediator of cultural norms and regulating production and consumption. Design culture, in shaping societal norms, conveys meaning and values, often reinforcing the dominant paradigm. However, counter-narratives challenging these norms have existed throughout design history. One of the first examples is the Deutscher Werkbund, which since 1907 has pursued the improvement of people's lives through affordable but functional products, aligning with socialist ideals. Among these, Mies van der Rohe's social housing in Stuttgart, Weissenhofsiedlung, provides an example of design elevating individual and societal quality of life (Figure 3.25).

Following World War II, voices challenging the dominant Modernist principles emerged, looking for alternative ways to define what 'good design' is. According to Fuad-Luke (2009, p. 41),

"they rejected the notions of an elite circumscribing and moralizing about what constituted 'good design' and embarked upon a design fiesta that marked the birth of the consumer economy, still with us today".

In this era, designers and architects such as Richard Buckminster Fuller advocated for environmentally and socially aware design. However, it was only in the 1960s that a real turning point was marked, rejecting the established norms and giving rise to diverse design ideologies. Richard Hamilton's advocacy for open debate and awareness in democratic societies gained prominence, leading to the rise of 'pop design' as a response to consumer economy and mass culture. In Italy, several movements and design groups like Archizoom (Figure 3.26) and Superstudio (Figure 3.27) critiqued design's role in consumerism, instead embracing cultural pluralism.

This attitude continued in the 1970s, with expressions of Anti-Design, led by Studio Alchimia (Figure 3.28), introducing political and deconstructionist messages into design. This Italian influence laid the foundation for a celebration of cultural diversity, against mainstream norms imposed by Rationalism and Functionalism.

In the graphic design domain, Ken Garland's First Things First manifesto in 1964 (Figure 3.29) urged a shift from profit-centred to human-centred design, sparking debate within the industry and prompting a reconsideration of priorities. The manifesto reads:

"We do not advocate the abolition of high pressure consumer advertising: this is not feasible. Nor do we want to take any of the fun out of life. But we are proposing a reversal of priorities in favour of the more useful and more lasting forms of communication. We hope that our society will tire of gimmick merchants, status salesmen and hidden persuaders, and that the prior call on our skills will be for worthwhile purposes. With this in mind we propose to share our experience and opinions, and to make them available to colleagues, students and others who may be interested".

Building on this evolution, 1980s designers across diverse disciplines began rethinking their approaches to create more eco-efficient buildings, products, and services, marking a

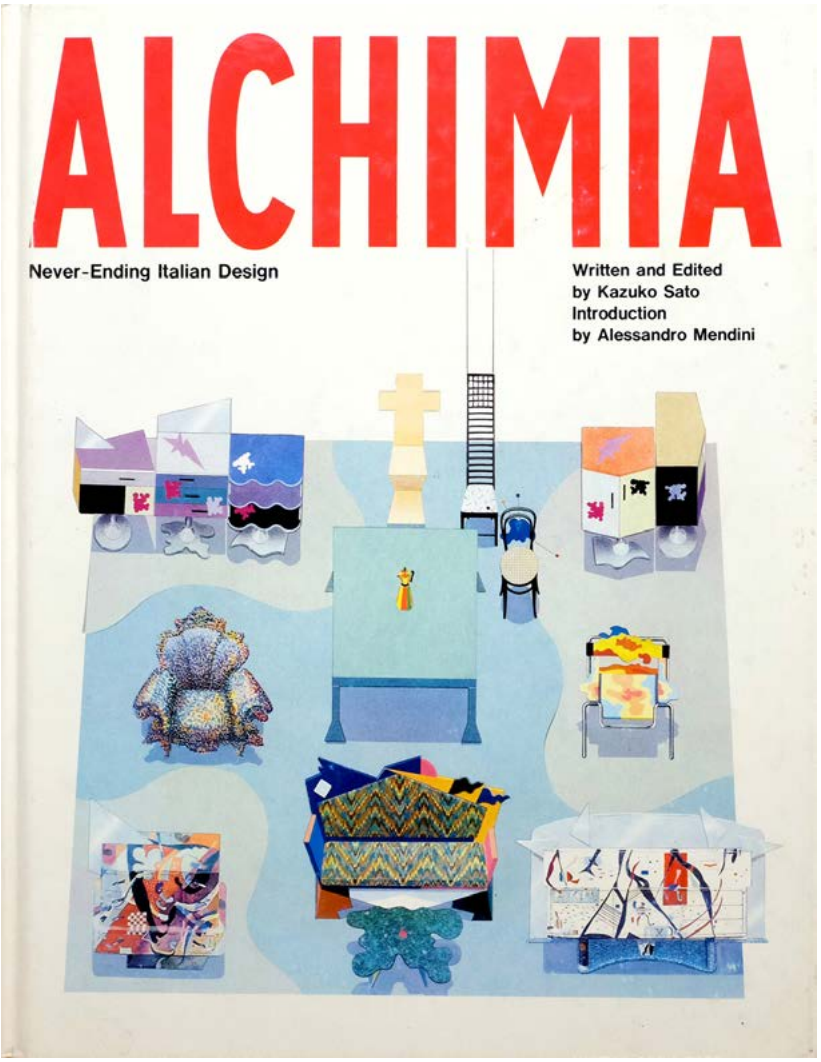
shift in design philosophy that continued over time. However, the focus of most design movements described above was influencing designers themselves, aiming to reshape their mindset and approach to their work. Hence, despite design being recognised as a communicative force, it struggled to effectively convey its social and environmental value to society and mostly responded to economic interests. Fuad-Luke (2009) highlights this paradox, asking whether the path of sustainability and design activism might offer design the opportunity to find its real voice within society. According to the author, the answer has to be found in more recent developments within the design community, where academics, critics, and practitioners have shown renewed interest in design activism. Several design approaches, such as co-design, social design, slow design, and metadesign, go beyond a traditional sustainability approach and address 'wicked problems' (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Today, the increasing complexity of problems faced by organisations has led to a growing interest in participatory design approaches as a means to achieve socio-political change. This has prompted a shift from 'designing for users' to 'designing with users', as will be discussed further in the following chapters. Emphasising the aspect of co-creation, participation in design is intended by Fuad-Luke (2009) as a form of design humanism, aiming to reduce domination and empower individual actors. Co-design is, in fact, able to emphasise the voices of final users in the design process, and carries a political intent related to power and inclusion, encouraging a direct form of democracy.

3.3.3 The Aesthetic Dimension of Design Activism

Although the perspective analysed offers valuable insights, it faces challenges in capturing the full spectrum of the aesthetic dimension of design activism. Markussen (2013) highlights this limitation, proposing to shift the focus from a broad consideration of capital to a more comprehensive exploration of the design act itself.

↗ **Figure 3.28** Alchimia, Never-Ending Italian Design, Kazuko Sato and Alessandro Mendini, 1985.

→ **Figure 3.29** First Things First Manifesto, Ken Garland, 1964.



In exploring design activism, some scholars, including Thorpe and Fuad-Luke, reference concepts from sociology and political theory. In contrast, Markussen (2013, p. 2) states that design activism "should not be modelled one-sidedly on the basis of these external theories". According to the author, Thorpe (2011) turns to sociology's typology of activism to categorise cases of design activism, while Fuad-Luke (2009) draws inspiration from environmentalist perspectives to explain the effects of design activism on social and behavioural change. Moreover, despite emphasising disruption and aesthetics as key to understanding design activism's impact, he leaves unanswered questions about how these actually operate.

Unlike typical political acts like boycotts, strikes, or demonstrations, design activism operates as a "designerly way of intervening in people's lives" (Markussen, 2013, p. 2). To explore the nature of design activism, focusing on the design act rather than using historical perspectives rooted in sociology or politics might represent a valuable perspective. To this end, Markussen (2013) proposes introducing the concept of 'disruptive aesthetics', which embraces on one hand the political potential of design, according to which it challenges existing power structures, and on the other hand the aesthetic potential, able to impact the emotional and behavioural aspects of people's lives.

According to the author, the aesthetic act is characterised by the introduction of new elements into the social sphere, reshaping perception and reconfiguring societal norms embedded in our everyday environment. Therefore, it

has a naturally disruptive essence, which can support the conceptualisation of design activism, recurring to the ideas of consensus and dissensus. While consensus defines hierarchical systems and refers to the common feeling of right and wrong, dissensus suspends the established social order, creating a space for new identities. This happens as dissensus reveals a gap between people's actions and their feelings, desires, and ethics. The disruptive character of aesthetic dissensus does not emerge in an institutional sense, but rather as a non-violent questioning of assumed truths, exposing hierarchies and creating areas for individuality.

This exploration of design activism and its emphasis on aesthetics intersects with the broader discourse on 'persuasive communication' through aesthetics, as discussed by Tursi (2007), according to whom the traditional notions of beauty are expanded to encompass ethical and truthful dimensions in the context of persuasive communication. This idea stresses the importance of exploring the role of aesthetics in communication within our visually-oriented perception.

Visual culture, shaped over centuries, has integrated symbols and meanings that are now blended in a globalised and digitised landscape. These serve as tools for constructing persuasive communication, aiming to influence people's thoughts, emotions, and actions through visual means. Their persuasive power emerges in relation to the symbolic and imaginative heritage of specific communities, including historical and cultural aspects. According to Tursi (2007), their value is not only associated with beauty but is part of a triad that includes ethics and truth.

In his analysis, the author also addresses the changing aesthetic landscape of our society, where visually appealing aesthetics are often used to convey misinformation or negative messages, impacting our perception and behaviour. In the digital realm, aesthetics do not only include traditional visual aspects such as colours and forms, but also considerations like the 'click aesthetic', with the purpose of immediate user engagement. Tursi (2007) explores how the structure of hypertext, with its fragmented and non-linear nature, influences the aesthetics of messages, which often only make sense in relation to other meanings within the broader digital space. For example, the aesthetic of a social media post is not only tied to its eye-catching aesthetics or vibrant colours but also to the user experience it offers. Instead of a linear narrative, the post may present fragmented information, through clickable and interactive elements, strategically designed to encourage engagement and emotional responses from users. Each click leads to different information, creating a non-linear experience. In the case of a social media activism Instagram campaign, a post could include several interactive items, allowing users to swipe left for additional information such as stats or personal storytelling, to click to discover call-to-actions or related hashtags, and to engage in polls or comment sections. This 'clickable' approach breaks away from traditional, linear communication, providing users with a more dynamic and engaging experience, to encourage users to join the activism campaign, becoming part of a larger narrative.

Together, these perspectives contribute to a nuanced understanding of aesthetics, not only as a surface-level attribute but as a dynamic force that shapes narratives, perceptions, and societal norms. Especially in design activism, aesthetics emerge as a powerful tool for fostering engagement and encouraging participation.

3.3.4 Storytelling Beyond Entertainment: Transmedia Activism

Building upon the exploration of social media activism and its evolution in the context of media convergence, it is important to shift the focus of the research into the realm of transmedia for good and transmedia activism. As previously discussed, the concept of transmedia storytelling has sparked questions about its potential applications beyond entertainment, particularly for advancing social causes and activism. This exploration aims to uncover how transmedia, with its multi-platform, narrative-driven approach, can become effective in mobilising communities, raising awareness, and encouraging positive change on a systemic level.

To explore these possibilities, it is essential to note that shaping people's perceptions of a particular issue and motivating them to action requires tackling several elements, including the environment, the emotional aspect, and the rational aspect of individuals (Heath & Heath, 2010). To achieve successful change, simply presenting data or engaging in rational discussions often appears insufficient. Instead, stories represent powerful tools to inspire change, as they connect with individuals on an emotional level and resonate with their intimate experiences. In this context, scholars stress the importance of emotional engagement and empathy in influencing behaviour (Giovagnoli, 2013). The opportunity for transmedia storytelling to address societal challenges therefore lies in the emotional and empathetic perspective it provides on such issues. This approach encourages the integration of multiple narratives from diverse voices, which facilitates collective action towards common societal objectives. By exploring social topics from different perspectives and connecting communities through stories, transmedia storytelling emerges as an innovative approach to building a culture of collaboration and co-creation, able to effect grassroots change (Telling Stories, 2016).

These premises brought the emergence of the domain of 'transmedia for good' (Giovagnoli, 2013), which consists in experimenting with new communication strategies to reshape our imagination and use it to strengthen social bonds, with the ultimate aim of creating a positive present and future for all. Giovagnoli (2013) stresses the necessity to shift how we depict the reality we want to transform, making the desired change more visible. This involves providing alternative perspectives to shift the perception of specific issues, and directing narrative contents towards tangible large-scale changes, recommending new habits and behaviours that can lead to significant improvements in society.

Transmedia for good includes a wide range of applications, which can be sorted according to three main categories: transmedia organising, which describes the - often involuntary - adoption of transmedia narratives by grassroots movements; transmedia education, where transmedia is used as a learning tool; and transmedia activism, which relates to the use of multi-platform storytelling to engage people in social or political causes.

Starting with transmedia organising, it is necessary to acknowledge how changes in communication systems, such as internet access, have transformed the relationship between social movements and the media, providing new opportunities for movements to document and diffuse their messaging. Coined by Sasha Costanza-Chock (2014), the term involves crafting a narrative of social change that unfolds across multiple media platforms, engaging supporters of the social movement in participatory media creation, and bringing attention to concrete

opportunities for action, all while being accountable to the movement's base. A core element of transmedia organising is the shift from professionally produced artefacts to grassroots media content, focusing on bottom-up organisational practices. These dynamics of participation and co-creation are effective in strengthening the movement's identity and enhancing commitment to the cause through community involvement (Ciammella, 2021).

Building on these applications, a central theme in contemporary activism is the concept of 'civic imagination', which Jenkins (2022) considers crucial in envisioning a better society. This involves the creative and collective process of imagining alternative futures, social structures, and civic engagement, thinking beyond the current state. It encourages participation in social movements and the creation of cultural expressions that contribute to positive societal change. More specifically, Jenkins' Civic Imagination project aims to map protests worldwide and examine how the role of pop culture in activism. The two concepts are interconnected as they highlight the power of narratives to mobilize communities, raise awareness, and drive change, with transmedia providing the tools and platforms for civic imagination to flourish, supporting broader civic engagement.

In transmedia education, narratives become tools for learning, especially among younger generations who seem to prefer an emotional approach over a rational one. Transmedia education creates immersive learning experiences, with multiple entry points for learning. As students engage with content across media, they follow personalised learning paths and approach education with higher curiosity.

Finally, when transmedia intersects with activism in transmedia activism, it becomes a potent tool for leveraging storytelling as a catalyst for social movements and change. In transmedia activism, transmedia becomes a systemic approach applicable to various communicative phenomena, particularly in social, political, and cultural activism. This represents a valuable approach that originated from the transformation generated by the advent of the Internet and social networks, which, as largely demonstrated, facilitate community building, participation, and collaboration dynamics.

Today, the presence of virtual communities where people with common goals can interact and share narratives has increased motivations for collective action. In this context, the idea of transmedia activism, introduced by strategist and advocate Lina Srivastava (Telling Stories, 2016), refers to

"the coordinated co-creation of narrative and cultural expression by various constituencies who distribute that narrative in various forms through multiple platforms, the result of which is to build an ecosystem of content and networks that engage in community-centered social".

The core idea is to broaden the reach of a narrative, using it as a foundation for a movement aimed at societal transformation. By strategically extending the story, transmedia provides diverse entry points, drawing more individuals into the narrative surrounding a particular issue or social goal. Srivastava's (Telling Stories, 2016) definition emphasises the role of transmedia activism in creating a narrative of social transformation shared across multiple media platforms and produced by multiple authors. With this concept, she highlights the collective meaning-generating capacity of transmedia stories, stressing the dependence on how local audiences perceive media form, story

structure, and engagement form. Transmedia's participatory nature facilitates the creation of shared narratives embodying shared values, objectives, and actions. However, this approach tends to align with top-down campaigns and strategically designed narratives.

Motivating audiences to become advocates for change, the intention behind transmedia activism is not to replace traditional activist practices, but instead to introduce new and more efficient mechanisms for communities to raise awareness about social issues, find new supporters, and extend their networks. In the network society, transmedia activism takes advantage of horizontal communication flows, enabling the creation of social impact through decentralised storytelling by different authors. Key to transmedia's effectiveness is its emphasis on participatory engagement and decentralisation, essential elements that empower individuals to actively contribute to and influence the unfolding story of the movement. These concepts are materialised in user activities generating narratives grounded in the movement's history and cultural values (Ciammella, 2021).

Co-creative practices form the basis of grassroots storyworld development, where a narrative universe structures itself through simultaneous user participation, avoiding top-down impositions. Social dimensions acknowledge the crucial relationship between creators and audiences, essential for sustaining creative action. Participatory worldbuilding involves the layering of symbols and meanings generated through distributed and participatory creative practices, serving as tools for analysing complex communicative phenomena, especially in political, social, and cultural activism.

The emergence of transmedia practices around grassroots narratives highlights the three key characteristics transmedia activism projects should include in order to sustain long-term action (CriticalThoughtTV, 2012a; MedeaTV, 2013):

→ **Local voice**: direct partnership with the platform creator, ensuring community-centred participation.

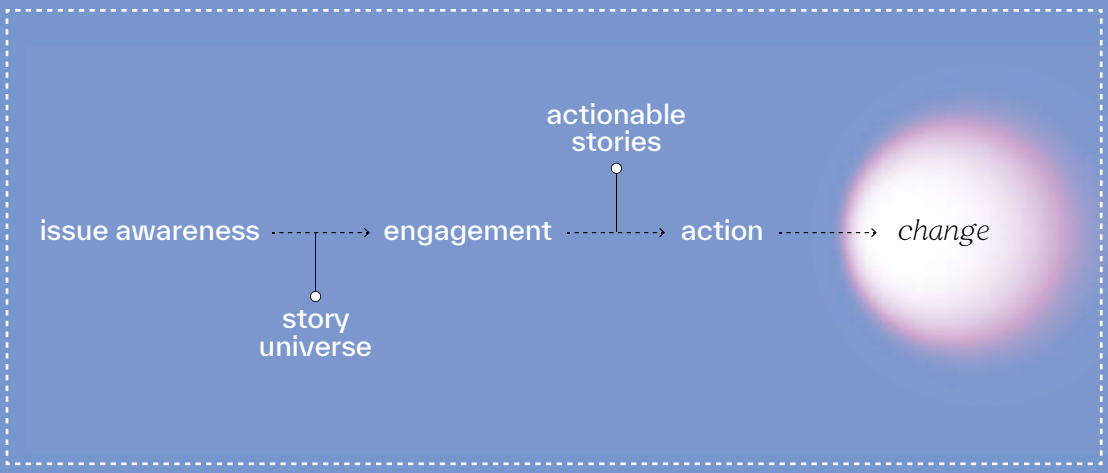
→ **Moving beyond awareness**: using platforms to connect participants to commit to a particular worldview, advocacy, action.

→ **Cross-platform engagement**: making use of various platforms to transcend boundaries and lead to transformation.

The strength of transmedia as a social innovation lies in its ability to weave together a tapestry of diverse voices, fostering participation and representation in social action. This approach, contrary to criticism, is not an inherent critique of Western media creators but emphasizes partnership, co-creation networks, and inclusivity, amplifying voices that are often repressed.

Against this background, transmedia activism proves useful in understanding how global imaginaries merge with local narratives, coordinating participative storytelling across various media platforms and generating civic and political engagement. A distinguishing feature of this approach is its engagement with community-centred narratives that amplify the voices of local communities, promoting compassion and respect, and shifting away from paternalistic approaches. The challenge lies in crafting narratives that resonate with audiences, considering their short attention spans, especially in the digital era.

The solution to this is to be found in simplifying complex stories while adhering to three pivotal principles: respect,



↑ **Figure 3.30**
Transmedia Activism Strategy, Lina Srivastava.

relevance, and resonance. These principles determine whether a project will work and be culturally significant in a specific context (CriticalThoughtTV, 2012b; MedeaTV, 2013). Central to this idea, and all of Srivastava's work, is the emphasis on the ethics of storytelling, particularly in the humanitarian realm, according to which ethical narratives are founded on humility and empathy.

However, working with local communities carries a number of potential risks. Among these is the risk that transmedia activism may oversimplify complex issues by presenting them in a way that lacks depth, failing to comprehensively represent the multifaceted nature of social problems. Related to this is the possibility of offering superficial solutions rather than systemic ones, limiting engagement with the root causes of the issue. Finally, transmedia activism can unintentionally reinforce hierarchical dynamics by falling into the 'saviour trap' narrative, which portrays activism as 'saviours' who have solutions to issues affecting 'helpless' marginalised communities (TEDx, 2013). This can induce a sense of superiority and inferiority, which hinders the formation of a more equitable and inclusive society.

Srivastava (TEDx, 2013) challenges this perspective, asserting that with the advent of communication technologies and personal connections, narratives and programs should be built on principles of partnership and collaboration. Ethical storytelling, in this context, involves recognizing that marginalized groups are not seeking salvation but rather demand to be heard, with their stories amplified. This shift in mindset represents an opportunity for progressing toward global well-being. As storytellers, exploring and embracing this approach is necessary for navigating ethical and impactful narrative creation, recognising that the power to effect meaningful social changes is in the participatory and shared dimension of stories (CriticalThoughtTV, 2012b). These should be firmly rooted in the communities they represent, using platforms that align with their cultural context, ensuring resonance and effectiveness. By prioritizing respect for communities, relevance to their experiences, and a narrative that resonates deeply, transmedia activism becomes a powerful tool in driving meaningful social change.

Moreover, the transition from action to change, whether at the grassroots or institutional level, is crucial. According to Srivastava (CriticalThoughtTV, 2012a; TEDx, 2011), effective transmedia activism projects should go beyond creating awareness and inspire concrete action and public support for an initiative. Transcending the limitations of traditional media, transmedia platforms are efficient in moving beyond mere awareness and engagement, addressing the gap towards impactful transformations. Srivastava's (TEDx, 2011) research

underlines the importance of bridging this gap, affirming that the ultimate goal of transmedia activism initiatives is to enact measurable change. To this end, they should connect viewers to social causes through multiple entry points and interactive experiences, and ensure the unique contribution of each medium in the storytelling process. Through engagement and participation, transmedia platforms create a sense of ownership over outcomes among individuals who participate. This ownership, in turn, predisposes individuals to take meaningful action. This application extends to leadership, breaking institutional and disciplinary barriers. For instance, in global development, transmedia principles facilitate communication between designers, global development professionals, and NGOs, fostering interdisciplinary efforts (TEDx, 2013).

To reach these objectives, Srivastava's approach to transmedia activism strategy covers a spectrum of key goals, crossing awareness, engagement, action, and ultimately, transformative change, as illustrated in Figure 3.30.

The strategy begins with an awareness phase, characterised by the use of stories as tools to raise attention to a particular social challenge. At this stage, the immersion of the audience in the story and the presence of multiple perspectives play the role of fostering empathy and driving change. Secondly, it moves beyond awareness and focuses on engaging with the issue. This involves constructing a narrative universe and supporting local communities affected by the problem, establishing common goals and audience participation, and leading to voluntary actions. The shift from engagement to action involves the use of various platforms that inspire people to become actively involved in the cause and take concrete steps towards change. Ultimately, the goal is to drive change and improve the initial situation.

To further guide transmedia activism initiatives, a Narrative Design Canvas (Figure 3.31) was designed by Srivastava as an adaptation of the traditional Business Model Canvas. The model identifies key elements of a transmedia activism project, serving as a valuable tool for planning campaigns, addressing social change, employing storytelling, and allocating resources. These thematic areas provide a basis for a more comprehensive examination, including audience segmentation, story support, content strategy, engagement, and partnerships.

In summary, transmedia activism initiatives appear as valuable tools to effect social change. By transcending traditional forms of communication, they successfully use a range of media platforms to engage communities, amplify narratives, and inspire collective action. To support her research, Srivastava (TEDx, 2013) introduces several projects at the intersection of technology, creativity, and grassroots movements, illustrating how transmedia storytelling can be integrated into shaping the narratives of contemporary social movements.

One notable project, Lakou Miziki (Figure 3.18), focused on the cultural revitalization of Haiti post-earthquake in 2012. Led by Zach Niles, the initiative recognises the fundamental role of the cultural sector in rebuilding societies (CriticalThoughtTV, 2012b; TEDx, 2011). By providing multiple entry points to explore the music and stories of Haitian musicians attempting to rebuild their society, the project highlights the importance of a strong cultural sector for community, identity, public participation, and individual self-expression.

Another impactful case is the Arab Spring project, which utilized collection tools linked to people's social media accounts

NARRATIVE STATEMENT	CHANGE STATEMENT
9. What is the story you are telling? How does that support the "Change Statement"?	1. What change in situation is the goal of the project being mapped?

PARTNERS	ACTIVITIES	THEMES AND ISSUES	AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT	AUDIENCE SEGMENTS
5. (a) Who are your core partners, who will help you co-create your project and content? (b) Who are your amplification partners, who will spread the word? (c) Which populations are you serving with this project? (d) Who are your beneficiary partners?	6. What is your "to-do" list? What do you need to do to succeed in the project?	8. What are the social impact issues you're working on? How does your project align with larger social issue themes in the world? What is your value proposition to add to those issues with this project?	3. This is akin to community engagement in other realms. What are you asking your audiences to do? What are you providing? How can you interact with your audience, digitally or in the real world?	2. Who is consuming your media or strategy? Who is interacting with it?
	RESOURCES		DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS	
	7. What do you have and what do you need in order to succeed?		4. Where are you finding your audiences? How will you distribute your content to them?	

COSTS	REVENUE STREAMS
10. (Optional to some projects) What is your budget?	11. (Optional to some projects) (a) Where will you source the money to realize this project? (b) Will you generate revenue from the project?

↑ **Figure 3.31** Narrative Design Canvas, Lina Srivastava.

↗ **Figure 3.32** Haiti's Lakou Mizik collective.

to contribute to the story of North African revolutions through Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. With an emphasis on the strength of stories told collectively, the project aimed to create a shared living memory of the spirit and arc of the revolution, keeping the revolutionary spirit alive as the region progressed .

These cases exemplify how transmedia activism connects individuals to others and to solutions, making its platforms more about the people and issues rather than technology. Recognising narrative as a currency in the social change equation, these projects highlight the significance of listening to repressed voices, creating avenues for cross-platform participation, and fostering dialogue (TEDx, 2011).

As stated by Srivastava (TEDx, 2011), "With stories, come opportunities", those of creating awareness, improving lives, offering freedom, safety, security, and a better life towards meaningful social change.


LAKOU MIZIK
HAITIANOLA

↘ **Figures 4.1 and 4.2**
Vivienne Westwood, fashion designer renowned for her anti-fashion activism, engages in a dialogue with young activists in this image from Dazed's "Vivienne Westwood: Youth is Revolting", capturing the essence of design, rebellion, and the collective pursuit for change.

↘ 4. Social Media as a Catalyst for Change: Implications in Fashion Brand Communication

This chapter aims to explore the implications of social media activism on the fashion industry, particularly in terms of transparency, accountability, and ethical practices. This exploration unfolds in Section 4.1, where the narrative begins by examining the communicative role of fashion within the broader societal context. Here, the research focuses on understanding how fashion transcends its utilitarian role and emerges as a powerful medium for self-expression, social identification, and cultural representation. By recognising the role of clothing as a language to articulate individuals' and communities' identities and beliefs, this section provides the basis to understand how activism is embedded within fashion. On this note, the discussion extends to theoretical perspectives on fashion activism, recognising the potential of fashion as a platform for social change.

4.1 Fashion and Society: an Interrelated Relationship

4.1.1 Fashion's Communicative Role within Society

Defining the cultural and social significance of fashion is a crucial component when discussing the impact of social media activism, as it provides a framework for comprehending the social context within which fashion communication takes place. Given the ability of fashion to reflect and shape cultural values and practices, analysing its relationship with society can help shed light on how social media activism is being used as an instrument to challenge dominant cultural narratives and promote social justice and how the industry is adapting to this process.

In the past, fashion has been associated with frivolity, consumerism, and elitarian beliefs, being denied its social and cultural significance. The act of dressing, often considered according to two opposite extremes - either as a necessity or vain superficiality - instead conceals an immaterial and cultural value that since the dawn of history has been able to suggest much about individuals and the society they inhabit. Fashion is inherently linked to communication and culture, as demonstrated by its etymology from the Latin 'factio', to the French 'façon', to the Middle English 'fashion', used to indicate 'shape' and 'appearance'. Implicit in fashion is the idea that people dress beyond functional needs, using garments as an interface to enter into relations with other individuals in society, presenting themselves via personal style and its relevance to their cultural background (Noris & Cantoni, 2021). As a consequence, the role of clothing can be considered one of mediation, as it can define and influence our social interactions with others.

Despite being implicit in the nature of clothing, it was only in the twentieth century that such ideas were introduced: fashion became a topic of research in sociology, psychology, and philosophy, starting to be understood in the context of social narrative and identity and imitation processes (Ambás & Sádaba, 2021). Precisely the communicative component of clothing has led scholars to study it not only as an anthropological necessity and semblance, but also as a result of social and cultural processes, which can be comprehended according to different perspectives - psychological, sociological, philosophical, historical, artistic, and so on. Concerning this, as stated by the French semiotician Roland Barthes in his series of essays 'The Language of Fashion' (1967/2013), historians and sociologists must concern themselves with how the individual's garment is contextualised in a system of norms that is linked to society more extensively. In particular, in an attempt to analyse the relationship between the individual and social nature of clothing, Barthes applied the theories of linguist Saussure (1922/2005) to fashion, discussing the need to differentiate between 'dress' and 'dressing'. Saussure (1922/2005) argued that language can be studied according to two aspects: the first one corresponds to the 'langue', referring to the formal, social, and conventional form of expression, structured according to a defined grammar; the second one corresponds to the 'parole', a concrete and individual act that refers to how individuals put language into practice. In doing so, Barthes proposed an analogy between language and clothing, stating as follows:

"It seems to be extremely useful, by way of an analogy to clothing, to identify an institutional, fundamentally social, reality, which, independent of the individual, is like the systematic, normative reserve from which the individual draws their own clothing, and which, in correspondence to Saussure's langue, we propose to call dress. And then to distinguish this from a second, individual reality, the very act of 'getting dressed', in which the individual actualizes on their body the general inscription of dress, and which, corresponding to Saussure's parole, we will call dressing. Dress and dressing form then a generic whole, for which we propose to retain the word clothing (this is langue for Saussure)" (Barthes, 1967/2013, p. 8).

It emerges therefore how fashion can be regarded as a social code that has the value of conveying meanings based on both collective and individual processes. These meanings occur to be on the one hand social and the other psychological. Indeed, clothing expresses and communicates, enabling individuals both to relate to the society in which they are immersed and to construct their own identity by expressing themselves freely.

Over time, fashion has embraced its intrinsic social nature and ability to affirm individual values and personal identity, with contemporary fashion fully realizing its ability to charge garments of profound meanings beyond their utilitarian function. Linfante (2021) emphasizes how the fashion industry is not limited to the production of garments but is a complex system that generates "ideas and possible visions of the future" (Linfante, 2021, p. 80).

Many creatives are fascinated by the cultural and social significance of the industry and have articulated their point of view on fashion and society via the most diverse communication tools, including "invitations, press kits, fashion shows, fittings, videos, advertising campaigns, catalogues, posts, stories, and the clothes themselves", which "represent the most varied forms of programmatic manifestos, a form that becomes here the substance of the discourse, not only, therefore, a mere aesthetic choice, but a real communicative 'necessity'" (Linfante, 2021, p. 80). Such communication is therefore conceived as a true need, representing a means of articulating complex ideas and values within a multifaceted and dynamic landscape.

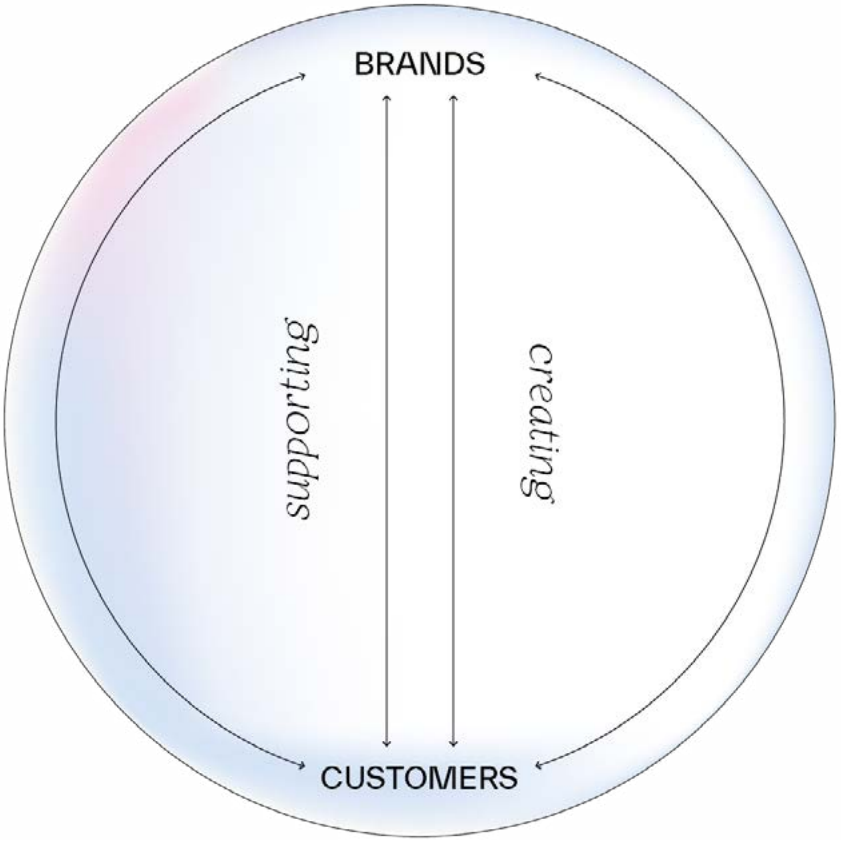
4.1.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Fashion Activism

Thus far, it has been identified how clothing acquires relevance in relation to its presence in society. In this regard, it becomes crucial to critically examine fashion in its ability to enact societal change, referring to the relationship between fashion and activism. According to Ambás and Sadaba (2021), fashion designers and firms are increasingly acknowledging the communicative potential of their garments and are implementing the principles of fashion activism as a means to transcend functionality and catalyze societal change. Applying criteria for design activism elaborated by Ann Thorpe (2011), fashion activism's main purposes can be listed as follows: to unveil and frame social issues, to advocate for change, to support marginalised groups, and to be confrontational against ordinary habits and systems of authority. Design is therefore used to build narratives able to counteract established practices and generate positive change: this is especially important in fashion due to its tangible and material assets, able to convey messages in a public, immediate, and hence more effective way.

The range of activities that can be undertaken by designers, brands, and consumers to bring about social change is quite broad and involves the relationship between audiences and fashion creators at different levels according to the graph depicted in Figure 4.1 (Ambás & Sádaba, 2021).

"Designers and brands can act as facilitators by supporting ongoing initiatives, but they can also trigger new social conversations. Meanwhile, wearers can decide what to wear and which initiatives to support by selecting certain brands, trends, or garments. [...] Fashion activism, as any other social movement organization, uses its means of expression in order to try and shape public opinion, putting pressure on those in positions of authority. Fashion and public opinion are inevitably intertwined" (Ambás & Sádaba, 2021, p. 221).

This section has attempted to provide a summary of the literature relating to fashion activism as a mechanism to urge social change, depicting how fashion naturally participates in public opinion through its ability to communicate and exert influence. Especially with the advent of digital platforms, fashion activism has flourished, as "brands and designers have found in [the] mediatic visibility [of social media] a powerful platform to send supporting messages and communicate their concrete actions regarding social issues" (Ambás & Sádaba, 2021, p. 233). In this context, there has been a significant shift in the power balance between brands and audiences, who now actively participate in fashion brand communication. The once passive role of the public has been radically transformed by digitalization, in line with the process of globalization that has affected fashion in the last decades. Fashion scandals exemplify the dynamics of mediatization, demonstrating how social media has been able to shape the fashion discourse (Vänskä & Gurova, 2022). The following part of this research will further explain these ideas, focusing on how social media can influence public opinion, and how activism and fashion relate to it. In the broader context of mediatization, these premises hold relevance in the examination of fashion not only as a vehicle for activism but also as its target.



↘ **Figure 4.3** Graph depicting the relationship between brands and customers in fashion activism (Ambás & Sádaba, 2021).

4.2 The Pervasive Role of Mediatization within Fashion Dynamics

4.2.1 The Rise of Digital Media and Mediatization in Fashion

Mediatization, which has acquired great relevance in academic research in the area of communication, refers to the increasing influence of media and communication technologies on various domains of social life, including politics, economics, and culture. It is related to the social transformations caused by globalization and technological development, together with the commercialization, urbanization, and individualization processes that have characterized the latest decades (Torregrosa & Sánchez-Blanco, 2021). Mediatization involves the integration of media platforms into everyday practices and describes the extent to which such technologies can shape social interactions and values. In the context of social media activism, mediatization represents a crucial factor to consider when analyzing its effects on brand communication, as it can help define the role of social media platforms in shaping public opinion, as well as companies' reactions to backlash. With regard to the field of fashion,

"mediatization constitutes a useful analytical tool for thinking through some of the changes that are currently taking place [in the industry] in relation to digital media. Conversely, thinking mediatization through the field of fashion and digital media allows for an understanding of processes of mediatization as anchored to the particularities of historical time. Understanding contemporary fashion practices also means understanding practices of digital media. 'Mediatization' is the tool that sheds light on the ways such practices meet" (Rocamora, 2017, p. 14).

The passage highlights the advantages provided by mediatisation as a tool to understand the changes that are taking place in the fashion industry, especially after the advent of digital technologies. By considering the mediatization of fashion and digital media, researchers can better understand the relationship of interdependence between the two domains. A similar point has also been made by Colucci and Pedroni (2021, p. IV), who agree that

"over the last two decades, the process of digitization has profoundly reshaped the dynamics of the field of fashion. Scholarly debate has framed the overall societal changes in this regard under the category of mediatization, understood as a meta-process of cultural and social transformation influenced by the media. The relevance of media has been recognized in the social construction of everyday life, society, and culture as a whole, with understood as mediatization a process grounded in the modification of communication as the basic practice of how people construct the social and cultural world. The mediatization of society functions as a process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic."

The term 'mediatization', although not recent, has been given new meanings as an object of communication and media sociology studies. The roots of this area of study are connected to traditional studies on mass communication, investigated by the Toronto school, McLuhan (1967/2011), Innis (1950/2022), and de Kerckhove (1995/1997). However, while their research focused on the role of media and technology within the development of civilization, mediatization studies emphasize the aspect of social change brought about by the evolution

of media. Despite the existence of different approaches to the definition of mediatization, the central idea discussed in literature stresses the role of media in shaping institutions and agents' experiences and practices: according to this concept, society can not be understood independently from media, which entangle all societal processes. Against this background, media have a real transformative power: they are not mere tools of communication able to mediate meanings but also constantly shape social dynamics and the way in which we engage in everyday activities. Hence, when addressing mediatization, scholars have often pointed out its distinction from 'mediation' (Rocamora, 2017). Whereas mediation is concerned with communication as a mediated process of delivering information, mediatization addresses how media affects people, institutions, and cultural and social practices (Torregrosa & Sánchez-Blanco, 2021). Stig Hjarvard (2013) suggests that the value of this theory depends on two main components: first, the understanding of the interdependent relationship between media and social practices, which influence each other; second, the impact that 'media logic' has on the functioning of other institutions, which replicate media practices in terms of production, distribution, circulation, and consumption.

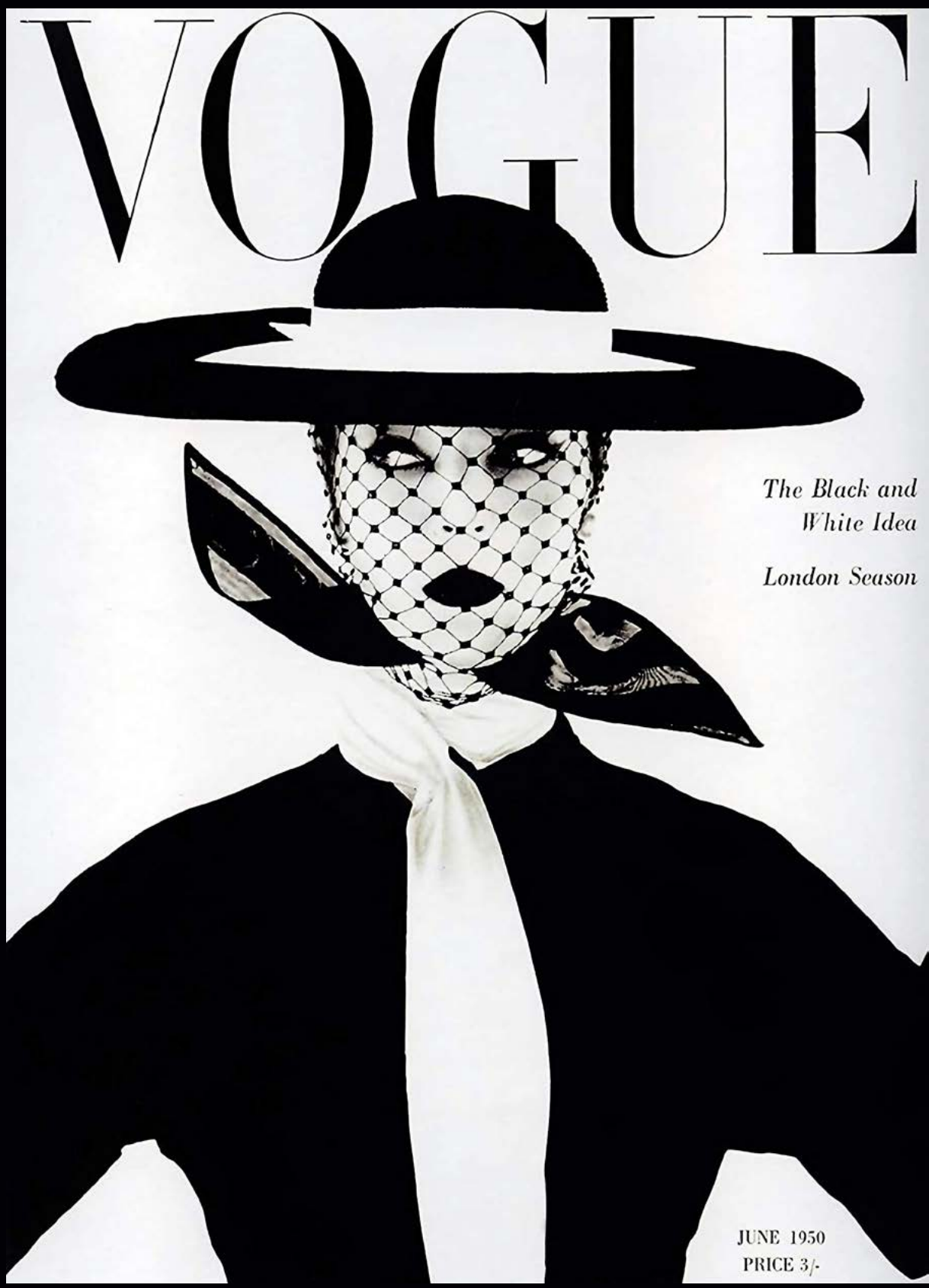
Fashion has been subjected to a process of mediatization ever since it began using the press as a means to communicate information on garments and trends. For a long period of time, magazines (Figure 4.4) have been the fashion industry's preferred media, largely due to technological progress in photography and the growth of advertising: between the 1890s and the digital age, the economic model of fashion publishing remained virtually unchanged and its revenues predominantly based on advertisements. This long-established structure was however unsettled by online media, as the industry experimented with new means of communication like fashion blogs (Figure 4.5) and Style.com in the early 2000s, and social platforms like Instagram and TikTok in contemporary times. When digital media first emerged, fashion reacted with scepticism, failing to see their full potential and perceiving them as a threat: the debut of online magazines and the emergence of new roles like digital influencers challenged the network of relationships once underpinning the entire fashion system, transforming the interactions between brands, investors, journalists and the public. However, as soon as the advantages of digitization were understood, the process of mediatization rapidly affected all areas in the industry, including the design, production, distribution, promotion, and consumption of clothing. Fashion moved from being an exclusive world inhabited by its producers to embracing the ordinary practices of the self (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021).

↓ **Figure 4.5** Founded by Patricia Handschiegel in 2004, StyleDiary.net is considered to be the first personal style blog.

It is especially in the context of digitization that media can be understood not only as tools to mediate information but also in their ability to shape society and fashion as a cultural field. In online environments, fashion has combined different channels and levels of communication, enhancing interactivity, immersivity, and engagement. Digital technologies allowed multiple languages to gather in a single virtual space, resulting in the need for a new approach to design and communication where fashion, design, graphics, photography, and video merge into hybrid and original artefacts. As mentioned by Gerrie (2019, p. 2),

"in the twenty-first century, as a plethora of products, a global industry and a cultural phenomena (western) fashion is predominantly viewed and experienced through the digital screen of our handheld devices. Through the evolution of media technologies such as Instagram and blogs, fashion in the twenty-first century has seemingly become more democratic, furthering its reach and influence on contemporary culture on a rapidly expanding global scale."

VOGUE



The Black and White Idea

London Season

JUNE 1950
PRICE 3/-

With digitalization and mediatization, interaction dynamics between brands and consumers have become more immediate and less exclusive: social media platforms allowed democratization in contemporary fashion as well as the introduction of narrative and emotional components into the fashion discourse.

The construction of a broader storytelling able to include behind-the-scenes moments and directly narrate the brands' point of view had already been introduced through cinema and fashion films, but ultimately blossomed with social media.

"Thanks to new technologies, communication tools and strategies are expanding, designed to increase and involve the public through attractive storytelling capable of generating new perspectives and innovative communication scenarios. Fashion has enriched the abacus of expressive possibilities by using first of all its most congenial materials such as fabrics, clothes, bodies moving in space, and then also the countless facets of digital communication, as a medium to convey personal points of view but also aesthetic, political, and social statements" (Linfante, 2021, p. 78).

On this note, it can be argued that social media have revolutionized fashion communication through the inclusion of hybrid languages and interactive transmedia modes, and by blurring the boundaries between fashion creators and social audiences. The direct involvement of users in the life of the brand allowed real value codesign and participatory practices via virtual spaces. An example is the "See Now, Buy Now" model, where brands use platforms like Instagram to live-stream runway shows. This allows a global audience to immediately access and purchase showcased items, breaking away from the traditional exclusivity of fashion events. The direct involvement of users in real-time events through social media illustrates a more inclusive and interactive approach to fashion communication. Through these new forms, fashion learned to observe itself and talk about itself in all its aspects, including the aesthetic, economic, and social spheres.

A key aspect of this transformation has indeed been the process of globalization, which is interrelated with mediation: on one hand, the reduction of spatial and temporal boundaries applied by media enables the very existence of globalisation, which, on the other hand, "amplifies the process of mediatization by institutionalizing forms of mediated communication in numerous new contexts" (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021, p. V).

In fashion, this translates into the possibility of creating "a globalized fashion imaginary" (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021, p. V), composed of images, practices, values, and stories that are shared by large groups of people and shaped via media.

Considering all the presented evidence, and referring to the words of Torregrosa and Sánchez-Blanco (2021, p. 69), it results clear that media innovations "are not only important due to their technological possibilities but also due to the new experiential conditions they permit". The described processes, together with fashion's ability to attribute meanings and identity expression to clothing, have shaped fashion as the cultural industry we know today.

4.2.2 Mediatization Processes of Social Change

Having discussed the role of mediatization in the evolution of fashion communication, it is necessary to address the ways in which mediatization occurs in fashion. To demonstrate this, it can be helpful to refer to Winfried Schultz's (2004) classification of mediatization according to four processes of social change, all of which have been witnessed in the cultural field of fashion. Although Schultz's categorization is designed to be applied to any technology or media - including writing, print, electricity, and

← **Figure 4.4** "The Black and White Idea", Vogue front cover by Irving Penn, 1 April 1950.

↓ **Table 4.1** Four mediatization processes of social change and related distinctive factors of digital communication (Torregrosa and Sánchez, 2021)

→ **Figure 4.6** Prada's first-ever digital streaming of their SS 2021 show. Technology was not only used as a platform but was incorporated in the collection as a design element, as demonstrated by the cameras and monitors in the setting, which were used to capture the designs from every angle.

↘ **Figure 4.7** After the Fall 2021 Men's show, Prada co-creative directors, Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons, engaged in a digital conversation with students from international universities, connected remotely.

mass communication - the following list only refers to examples of digital technologies as discussed by Colucci and Pedroni (2021):

→ **Extension**: media technologies extend the intrinsic boundaries of human communication in terms of space, time, and the expressiveness of communication. This process affects the experience of space and time, which grows to be independent of the body (e.g. fashion blogs and social media profiles have transformed fashion discourse into a continuous and ubiquitous conversation that can be accessed by individuals who were previously excluded from fashion information).

→ **Substitution**: media become a substitute for direct physical processes and face-to-face interactions, which transition to virtual space (e.g. social media create a space for online comparison and discussion between fashion consumers; the online broadcasting of fashion shows during the Covid pandemic, as in Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7).

→ **Amalgamation**: mediated and nonmediated actions intertwine through mediatization, as their boundaries blur. Media becomes routinized, permeating everyday life and entering the professional, economic, cultural, political, and public spheres. This way, the definition of reality operated by media merges with its social definition (e.g. fashion influencers displaying online their private and offline lives; hybrid forms of communication and events, commonly referred to as "phygital").

→ **Accommodation**: the existence of media itself causes changes within already-existing media and society. As new forms of technologies emerge, they introduce new logic, and demand adaptations to these new rules (e.g. social media have changed the rhythms of fashion communication, introducing a demand for constant updates and forcing the traditional fashion press to adapt to the digital environment).

When this classification is applied to digital technologies, these processes are linked to the four distinctive factors of digital communication: interactivity, hypertextuality, hypermediality, and hyperconnectivity. These are depicted in Table 4.1, presented by Torregrosa and Sánchez (2021):

EFFECTS	DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: DISTINCTIVE FACTORS
Extension: Amplification of the limits of space and time and of the possibilities of representation.	Mass digitalization of contents. Condition that makes the rest of the distinctive factors possible.
Substitution: Virtualization of the experience	Interactivity. Active participation of users in the production of contents.
Amalgamation: Hybridization of mediated and non-mediated practices	Hypertextuality and multimedia. Existence of non-sequential contents that are continuously modified, and convergence of media and languages in the production, distribution, and consumption of contents. Different formats and languages (written text, audio, images, etc.) that were formerly independent are now combined in the same medium.
Accommodation: Ubiquitous and permanent presence of digital technologies and their logic.	Hyperconnectivity. Reticular configuration that permits open exchange of one-to-many and many-to-many.

As illustrated by the table above, the process of extension of space and time beyond physical restrictions allows the creation of events that permanently inhabit the virtual space:


DENISA


PRADA
WHAT IS THE “PRADA-NESS”?
Ikkei, Nara

→ **Figure 4.8** Beauty brand Glossier's shop is designed to be perceived as an "Instagrammable Space", ensuring a rich and multi-channel shopping experience for consumers.

once content is archived on the Internet, it allows consumption outside chronological and topographic limits, feeding audiences' increasingly higher need for immediate and fast-paced fruition. Mass digitalization and global transmission of content provide opportunities for interactive and participatory engagements with culture. These digital technologies both respond to and generate a collective desire for greater mutual and collaborative approaches in society. Torregrosa and Sánchez (2021, p. 68) observe that

"the mass digitalization of contents can mainly be observed in three effects. First, it extends the categories of space and time and goes beyond the limits of physical presence. Next, it boosts the technical quality of reproductions and the hyperrealism of representations, and third, it facilitates the fragmentation, manipulation, combination, and re-composition of contents in such a manner that the convergence of cultural output is multiplied".

As stated, digital culture has also shaped the formal qualities of the content itself, which now has to stand out in the excess of information and material flowing through the Internet: theatrical, multisensory, hyper-realistic and high-quality content emotionally attracts consumers in search of memorable experiences.

Another element which stands out is that, as digital and analogical have progressively integrated within one sphere, a neat distinction between the processes of substitution and amalgamation has also dissolved. Two effects of the hybridization of mediated and unmediated approaches involve users' direct participation in content production and the convergence of content in a single place. The intersection of face-to-face and virtual practices and the creation of transmedia content increase entry points for the public, enhancing its engagement and interest. This way, a background for wider conversations and impact is set. This context also sheds new light on everyday objects and practices, which gain new meanings and relevance as they are showcased on social media: as reality can be accessed virtually at all times, these experiences are fully integrated into people's daily lives, which in turn become subject to the expectations of this new reality. To illustrate this process, it is possible to address the example of 'Instagrammable spaces' (Figure 4.8), where physical environments are designed with visual appeal specifically for social media sharing. In these spaces, users actively participate by creating content through photos and videos, blurring the lines between online and offline experiences. The convergence of physical spaces and virtual content creation exemplifies the dissolution of traditional boundaries, with everyday objects and practices gaining new significance in the context of social media representation.

The emphasis on examining everyday communication practices draws attention to "the idea of mediatization as an ordinary phenomenon and micro-process" which, according to Rocamora (2017, p. 14), has been overlooked by scholars. Among the body of literature concerned with this hypothesis,

"Knoblauch insists on the importance of looking at mediatization at the micro-level of social interaction, whilst Jansson notes that it is only by looking into routinized mundane practices of communication 'that we will be able to see how mediatization is socially realized and shaped through embodied practice'" (Rocamora, 2017, p. 14).

In the context of new technologies and fashion, one common example of this concept is represented by 'selfies', which manifest mediatization as an ordinary phenomenon of contemporary lives. Selfies embody the concept of 'networked self', intended as a constructed and mediatized self which inhabits the online realm: this is ultimately an image to be shared on digital screens, and that can be crafted and performed accordingly (Rocamora, 2017).

"The social, institutional, and cultural changes inherent to the processes of mediatization are a theoretical framework of interest to investigate this phenomenon because of the interdependence between the evolution of technologies and the everyday practices of production, distribution, and consumption of cultural goods. Digital communication is not only a medium that conditions the possibilities of expression and circulation of content—just another technological medium—but also contributes to the development and maintenance of culture. The consolidation of this new ecosystem has led to social interaction "in" the media, rather than "with" the media, in such a way that the analysis of the [fashion phenomena] is inseparable from the digital space of interaction." (Torregrosa & Sánchez-Blanco, 2021, p. 72)

Today, two of the main contexts of fashion in which mediatization and digitization are evident are runway shows and spaces of communication and retail. Before the digital era, catwalks were mainly directed towards buyers and the press, as they aimed to physically showcase brands' collections. However, as digital culture evolved, fashion shows have grown into media events, closer to the field of entertainment and aimed at a democratized audience. With the rise of fashion live streaming, starting with Victoria's Secret Fashion Show in 1999, collections debuted among a global and real-time audience, meaning that final consumers could finally be more integrated into brands' lives (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021). It is noteworthy that in the past the audience for fashion designers was primarily limited to the fashion élite, which included industry professionals like André Leon Talley, Cathy Horyn, Suzy Menkes, and Tim Blanks. These fashion critics held a significant influence on the industry, hence why all designers aimed to impress them with their work. However, due to the conservative attitude of this minority audience, emerging designers often had to resort to conservative and limited artifices in order to gain recognition. One instance of a simple but impactful manoeuvre occurred at Martin Margiela's first runway show at Paris Fashion Week in the autumn of 1989 (Figure 4.9), which was held in a derelict playground in the suburbs of the city, rather than taking place on formal runways near the Louvre museum like all other catwalks. It was only with digitization that runway gimmicks became popular as a way for designers to compete for attention on mobile phone screens. Especially for emerging designers, it has become increasingly challenging to gain recognition without a well-established name in the industry, since audiences tend to focus on designers they are already familiar with, making it more difficult for new brands to break through and gain visibility (Bliss Foster, 2023).

Current runway shows display the process of integration of new media within the fashion industry as they are now designed and staged for online consumption through digital

↓ **Figure 4.9** Martin Margiela's first runway show at Paris Fashion Week in the autumn of 1989 was held in an abandoned playground in the suburbs of the city. The front row was packed with children from the neighborhood and the show was open to the public, marking a significant point in fashion history.

→ **Figure 4.10** Backstage of the Viktor & Rolf Spring 2023 Couture Fashion Show, portraying a model wearing a deconstructed ballgown.

devices. Hence, fashion events can be regarded as a symbol of the transformative power of digital media over common practices of both fashion consumers and producers. This paradigm shift has urged designers to adopt a novel approach to fashion creation, where the digital realm assumes a central role. Furthermore, the acquisition of fashion knowledge has undergone substantial changes, with social media shaping our tastes and understanding of style and garments. Mediatization does not only tackle fashion but also fashion design, with the consequence that most collections are now composed with a two-dimensional attitude. Our focus on clothing has shifted from its physicality to a more distant perspective as intangible objects to be experienced out of our corporeal frames. As up-close craftsmanship and subtle details disappear on digital screens, the focus of the design process has shifted from garment construction to image-making (Rocamora, 2017). The disconnect between the visual consumption of fashion and the physicality of the actual products has captured the attention of scholarly discourse as well as the interest of fashion designers, as exemplified in the Viktor & Rolf Spring 2023 Couture show. The collection featured deconstructed and unexpectedly distorted garments (Figure 4.10) to provide a sense of absurdity and alienation, hinting at the impact of internet culture on our perception of reality.

As explained by Pithers (2023, para. 1) in her runway analysis,

"There was a comment here about internet culture and how consuming visuals on our phones—snapping photographs and immediately being able to invert them, using filters to distort and enhance our silhouettes and bone structure—has warped our sense of reality. "There is a disconnect between what we see, and the physicality of the product," said Snoeren. Then there is the internet's context-less state, where one scroll can take you from a fashion show to a mass shooting. "The information that comes at us, going from making banana cake to so many people being killed in Ukraine," said Snoeren. "It's: What kind of world are we living in? It's absurd," said Horsting. Luckily, the duo found some fun in the incongruity. As a viral moment that wasn't shot through with controversy, it was a masterclass."

On this end, in this evolving and contradictory paradigm where the inherent tridimensionality of garments becomes increasingly marginalized, the overall significance of fashion creations has undergone a semantic transformation.

Besides fashion events, the second context affected by mediatization is that of spaces of communication, selling, and consumption. The logics of the digital environment have given shape to spaces where editorial and commercial merge, making magazines more visual and interactive, and integrating website and apps into physical stores. Since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for such transformation, in times when companies forcibly embraced e-commerce and omnichannel strategies, while consumer shopping behaviour shifted. As communication and marketing practices moved to an exclusively digital presence, the whole fashion system, including the luxury segment, seemed to implement fast fashion's business procedures, pushing up the pace of production in an endless delivery cycle. On the contrary,

"other activities, mainly manufacturing, cannot be virtualized or managed remotely, and the impact of Covid-19 has been negative. Fashion brands have cancelled orders, negatively impacting garment workers. As Bridges and Hanlon explain, 'the crisis has reinforced existing structural inequalities within the industry, with workers disproportionately impacted across multi-mediated global production networks.' At the same time, the crisis has shown how fundamental digital media are in the material and symbolic infrastructure of contemporary fashion" (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021, p. VIII).

In conclusion, the literature recognizes the pervasive nature of mediatization processes within the fashion industry and society at large, emphasizing the enduring and profound impacts of digital media, globalization, mediatization, and democratization. The latter will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent section of this research.

4.3 From Exclusivity to Accountability: Democratization and the Rise of Call-out Culture in the Fashion Industry

4.3.1 Trickle-Down to Bubble-Up Mechanisms: a Shift in Fashion Consumption

The process of fashion democratization has undergone a progressive evolution, marked by significant changes in the fashion industry. Over time, there has been a shift from a traditionally exclusive and elitist system to one that aims to address a broader and more diverse audience. This transformation can be attributed to various factors, including societal and cultural changes, and advancements in technology and communication. The increasing accessibility of the industry to a broader demographic has strengthened the relationship between fashion and societal dynamics, affirming the role of fashion as a mirror and a catalyst for the evolving aspirations within society.

As proposed by Cronberg (2013), the categorization of 'hot' and 'cold' societies established by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) can provide valuable insights to discern the function of fashion in societal progress. The classification is based on the contrasting perspectives on change and development observed among different civilizations: 'hot societies' embrace change as essential and irreversible for societal advancement, while 'cold societies' perceive life and history in a cyclical manner, without actively questioning past and existing lifestyles nor seeking significant transformations. Fashion can be considered a manifestation of the first category, as its drastic changes reflect the attitude of 'hot' societies towards economic, cultural, and social growth. This view is prevalent in the Western world and capitalist economies, where fashion serves as an instrument to achieve progress due to its trend-based character and its ability to forward social innovation. The idea that fashion exists under constant development constitutes a necessary premise for analysing the process of democratization in the industry as a continuous and progressive evolution.

↑ **Figure 4.11** German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel, author of the 'trickle-down' theory.

Traditionally, fashion existed as a highly hierarchical structure, designed to be available only to the aristocracy and high-status groups: being fashionable meant showcasing wealth, and lower classes tried to achieve social mobility by emulating the trends introduced by noblemen. The German sociologist and philosopher George Simmel (Figure 4.11) was the first to express a sociological interest in the mechanisms behind the emergence of fashion trends and to reflect on the relationship between the masses and fashion. His thoughts were articulated in the explanatory 'trickle-down' theory and popularised in his essay "Fashion" (1910), where he suggested that once trends had been appropriated by lower groups, the upper class introduced new ones, driven by a desire to stand out from them.

In particular, fashion was conceived by Simmel as a social phenomenon arising from the tension between two instinctive human impulses: one towards imitation and the other towards differentiation, which together allow people to express themselves and to be understood by other individuals belonging to their society. These inherent inclinations are identified as the necessary conditions for fashion to spread as well as the motivations that allow trends to become rooted in a social setting. In this manner, while on the one hand fashion reinforces the cohesion

of a certain social group, on the other it reveals the differences between members of different groups. Following the principle of differentiation, individuals aspire to capture their freedom and realise themselves successfully as original subjects. They embrace codified societal languages and adjust them to their own needs, resulting in the best possible expression of their personality. Indeed, it is possible to assert that

"fashion is an expressive possibility [...]. Individuals in today's society use fashion as an easy tool to make explicit the relationship that binds them to a society undergoing constant change, in which links with the past often have to be broken; then, fashion offers a way out and a link to the future" (Sellerberg, 1996, para. 4).

Conversely, fashion is at the same time a means of legitimising the desire of man to assert himself as an individual, since he needs social support in doing so. Hence, dressing also becomes the tool that allows society to propose a universally recognised model within which any subject can distinguish himself.

By means of this dual tension, clothing thus becomes the vehicle through which class discrepancies are materialised. The 'trickle-down' theory explains that fashions are introduced by the upper classes out of their intention to differentiate themselves, only to be abandoned and replaced by others when they get acquired by the lower classes - hence, when their differential quality disappears. Whereas the upper classes act out of a desire to create and maintain a distance between societal strata, the lower classes, by contrast, have the ambition to erase it, according to a desire for ascending social mobility. Within the context of fashion as a phenomenon, the process of change arises through the two aforementioned tensions, which are antagonistic but complementary. Via these changes, fashion can also characterise itself as an expression of Zeitgeist ('spirit of the times'), as it is simply a reflection of the evolution of a certain society over time. The storytelling value of fashion, therefore, refers both to the narrative that people make of themselves individually, according to their original identity and experiences, as well as to the collective narrative that a certain community creates in a certain place and historical period.

Throughout history, fashion has let its intrinsic communicative and immaterial nature take more and more space in its evolution, progressively establishing itself as a culture-intensive industry and as a narrative practice. Indeed, globalisation, democratisation and the massification of both fashion and the media have changed the mechanisms that allow individuals to express themselves socially through the act of dressing. Against this background, the definition of fashion advanced by Simmel is anachronistic when placed in context with the contemporary landscape. Whereas the 'trickle-down' mechanism worked until the 1960s, subsequent social changes and the emergence of protest and anti-system movements introduced new possibilities of storytelling through clothing. Industry innovations allowed large-scale production of garments, disseminating fashion to all social classes and challenging the dominant culture. If in the past the social nature of clothing had been only observed by scholars, in this progressive process of democratization fashion finally started defining its cultural role through "endogenous" statements made by people who operated within the industry. Over time, creatives experimented with multiple approaches, languages, and communication tools to fit the diversity of messages and points of view they had to convey. Since that moment, the creative and communicative process has become increasingly interconnected, as the concept of fashion has widened to embrace numerous media and channels, in addition to commercial products (Linfante, 2021). In this period, fashion was met with an ever-increasing

level of complexity that introduced new mechanisms such as the 'bubble-up' effect. According to the latter, numerous trends embedded in high fashion and the mainstream would stem from the lower social classes, minorities and countercultures, which stand out as deviating from commonly accepted social norms. Technological progress was a determining influence in this respect, as the rise of mass media made it possible for small subcultures to merge into increasingly larger groups until they became part of mass culture itself. The turnaround from 'trickle-down' to 'bubble-up' phenomena introduced a shift from clothing as a status symbol and class differentiation to fashion as freedom of expression and narration of individual emotions and values.

4.3.2 The True Extent of Fashion Democratization in the Digital Age

The aforementioned process of democratization progressively continued until a new systemic shift occurred in the latest decades when the emergence of digital technologies shaped fashion production and consumption processes in a way that contributed to unveiling fashion's elitist aura. The latest trends are now available to anyone as a consequence of the evolution of fast fashion and social media, and the rise of new professional roles like those of bloggers and influencers. Initially perceived as a threat to the strict hierarchy of fashion, these were later incorporated into brand communication strategies because of their appeal to the general public.

Nevertheless, despite the gradual extension of the fashion system to encompass a wider demographic, the fulfillment of true democratization remains a subject of uncertainty, carrying implicit contradictions, as noted by Cronberg in her article "Can fashion ever be democratic?" (2013). According to the author, given that fashion's aspirational element has traditionally been unachievability, the feasibility of making luxury accessible on a large scale raises pertinent questions. As suggested by Foster (2021), it must first be investigated whether accessibility exclusively refers to ownership, or whether it comprehends further dimensions. On one hand, it can be argued that the notion of democratization in fashion predominantly pertains to the possession of fashion products, which can only be witnessed by a select minority who has the financial means to access them. Consequently, only this privileged class can fully grasp the full artistic experiences designers envision. An alternative perspective proposes that if accessibility is intended in broader terms, luxury brands can achieve accessibility through transparent storytelling of the full creative process behind fashion products.

On this note, if historically fashion was popularised through fashion shows and addressed to a restricted and specialised public, it later became necessary to turn its communicative nature into a real system in Western capitalist societies. In the postmodern age, the fashion system was faced with a fragmentation of its own role and inevitably had to adopt new languages to portray the contemporary pluralism of identities. As the French philosopher François Lyotard (1979/2008) pointed out, the present condition does not foresee the existence of a totalising philosophy or narrative that can ensure social cohesion, but rather an abundance of opinions, none of which imposes itself on the others. In this context, storytelling emerged as a more efficient form of communication, catering to an increasingly hybrid, dynamic, dissonant public, while media assumed the role of guidance and information dissemination. However, it is important to recognize that the experience of fashion has always occurred through the use of 'mediated images', a term used to indicate depictions of reality that are altered through various technological devices to convey a specific message. Indeed, storytelling has also been subjected

to filtering and manipulation by industry stakeholders for public consumption. For this reason, it can be stated that Foster's (2021) hypothesis for which storytelling could facilitate accessibility overlooks the underlying motivations driving the process of democratization in fashion, which prove to be economic rather than democratic. As regarded by Cronberg,

"to call fashion democratic is still more of a marketing exercise than any sign that the old rules regarding the exclusivity of the industry have actually changed" (2013, p. 3).

Against this background, considerable evidence has shown that the exposition of an unprecedented redundancy of opinions and information - largely due to the proliferation of digital media platforms and the democratization of content creation - has forced individuals to confront a multitude of viewpoints that often contradict one another. The advent of digitization has facilitated the emergence of independent and alternative media sources that challenge the established niche of traditional editorial platforms. This environment has fostered the convergence of different disciplines and languages including journalism, photography, and fashion film. However, a thought-provoking paradox emerges from the current democratized context: despite the increased accessibility to a wide spectrum of viewpoints, the general public continues to rely on critical and authoritative voices to form opinions on controversial matters (Gerrie, 2019). The dependence on trusted sources suggests that, while digitization has expanded the mediascape, it has not entirely eliminated the need for expert insight and has delegated critical analysis to external sources in order to navigate the complexity of information and shape public opinion.

4.3.3 The Shift in Expectations for Fashion Brands

Within the context of the 'postmodern condition' affecting contemporary fashion consumers, it is crucial to acknowledge that brands have also assumed a position as authorities able to influence the prevailing sentiment of the public. Audiences trust companies as reliable sources of guidance to form opinions on a range of social and political issues, based on their brand communication and positioning. As Ambás and Sádaba remind us,

"the fashion industry does not only sell shoes, dresses, and handbags, but the aspiration of becoming a better version of ourselves. Therefore, values and feelings are easily translatable into campaigns and communication strategies. And in an era when consumers are losing their trust in government institutions, they are turning to brands to represent the causes that they believe in, whether it's race, gender equality, human rights, or democracy" (2021, p. 231).

Commenting on this passage, it is notable that the reliance on fashion brands stems from multiple factors. As pointed out by the authors, businesses have been able to offer a sense of coherence against a background of political crises and transformations that have disintegrated faith in traditional institutions. Through strategical positioning, brands have often identified societal challenges that align with consumers' beliefs and have promoted themselves as advocates for equality to generate trustworthiness. This structure, although explored in several domains, has been particularly effective for fashion brands due to the cultural and social significance encompassed by fashion. As explored earlier in the research, clothing is loaded with symbolism and meanings, thus becoming a medium through which we can communicate and share experiences. In the latest decades, the emphasis on such intangible values has made it possible for companies to experiment with communication strategies and marketing campaigns which presented aspirational narratives for consumers. This way, they connect with their

target audience by appealing to their desires, offering idealized visions of the self that strongly resonate with individuals. Along the same lines, Colucci and Pedroni (2021, p. X) affirm that

"fashion companies and brands are core actors in the fashion industry as creators of innovations and value-added throughout the supply chain, but also as co-producers of fashion narratives themselves or in partnership with gatekeepers such as magazines and digital influencers".

The identification of brands as "co-producers of fashion narratives" surely highlights their multifaceted influence and involvement in the current fashion ecosystem, as well as their evolving role, which has largely been shaped by the advent of digital platforms.

With the appearance of online media, the dynamics between fashion companies and consumers have undergone significant transformations. The increase in connectivity due to digitization has made their relationship more fluid and straightforward, bringing about more risks and constraints. The use of social networks in particular has allowed audiences to voice their opinions via reviews, with a direct influence on the brand's perception and reputation. Companies sought to interact with this newly connected public through innovative strategies that would not focus exclusively on the brand, but instead empower consumers and their system of values.

"Company-centric traditional brand communication and messages appear to be less effective than before, as the Internet has considerably changed the sources of information on which consumers rely on. Social media platforms have become the primary source of information for consumers and one of the most powerful marketing tools for fashion companies. Instagram has for example been recognized as the currently most influential source for fashion insight. Given the power — and the economic returns — of creating content and gaining consumer attention on social media, fashion companies begun to regard digital communication as more valuable and authentic than traditional advertising" (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021, p. IX).

As online consumers become increasingly more powerful, brands aim to engage them through customer-centric communication. Because of the rising demand for authenticity, this environment requires companies to appear genuine to reinforce people's trust in the brand: in the words of Colucci and Pedroni (2021, p. X),

"whether it is a matter of consistency, conformity, connection or continuity, it cannot be denied that the quest for authenticity will shape fashion brands in the digital era".

Given all that has been mentioned so far, it is clear that the combination of these factors has determined the emergence of brands as influential actors in public discourse, while simultaneously introducing new expectations concerning their actions and communication practices. In recent years, brands have inevitably paid more attention to diversity, inclusivity, and identity recognition, being forced to approach issues with more respect and sensitivity.

This change in consumer expectations has been particularly pronounced among younger, digital-savvy generations, who are becoming more interested in brands that share their values and are not afraid to engage in social discourse, challenging past times when companies tended to avoid political statements. Coherence between brand ethics and political action has proved to be highly valuable in customer engagement, especially with the advent of online platforms, which allowed more direct relationships between businesses and audiences. In particular, Gen Z is regarded as the most politically active demographic on social media, followed by millennials, whose spending power is an important source of

revenue for contemporary businesses. Against this background, fashion companies have become more involved with social, political, and environmental issues. To explain such dynamics, the notion of corporate activism appeared in academic research to indicate

"a company's willingness to take a stand on social, political, economic, and environmental issues to create societal change by influencing the attitudes and behaviors of actors in its institutional environment" (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020, p. 463).

The benefits of corporate activism for companies include maintaining positive relationships with the local community and employees by reflecting their political beliefs and shaping their outside perception as up-to-date to their competitors (Ambás & Sádaba, 2021).

Adopting a similar perspective, Vänskä and Gurova (2022) talk about the use of 'cultural branding' in fashion communication. The idea of cultural branding, applied by brands such as Benetton and Nike, depicts a marketing strategy for which brands actively join social conversations, taking a stand on issues that generally belong to the domain of politics. In contrast to traditional marketing strategies that address specific consumer segments or psychographic types, cultural branding pursues tensions and aspirations that are ingrained in society. Through this approach, companies leverage individual anxieties and conflicts in society to shape their narratives: this results in the creation of meaningful connections on a cultural level, likely to influence brand perception to a considerable extent. This concept is relevant as it refers to the expansion of branding to include cultural, sociological, and theoretical research that complements economic strategies. While on the one hand fashion brands can benefit from audiences' support that comes with cultural branding, on the other hand, it can make them an easy target for criticism and strong emotional reactions. When businesses expose themselves as advocates of diversity and inclusion, their proactive role often meets the opposing reaction of a digitally-empowered public that panders to prevailing conventions. In response to these dynamics, the transformations brought by corporate activism and cultural branding are frequently reflected at a managerial level, as proved by the establishment of new roles to embed inclusive and diverse perspectives in the administrative organisation of the companies themselves. These changes also demonstrate the necessity for businesses to align their internal decision-making processes with their external communication and social engagement.

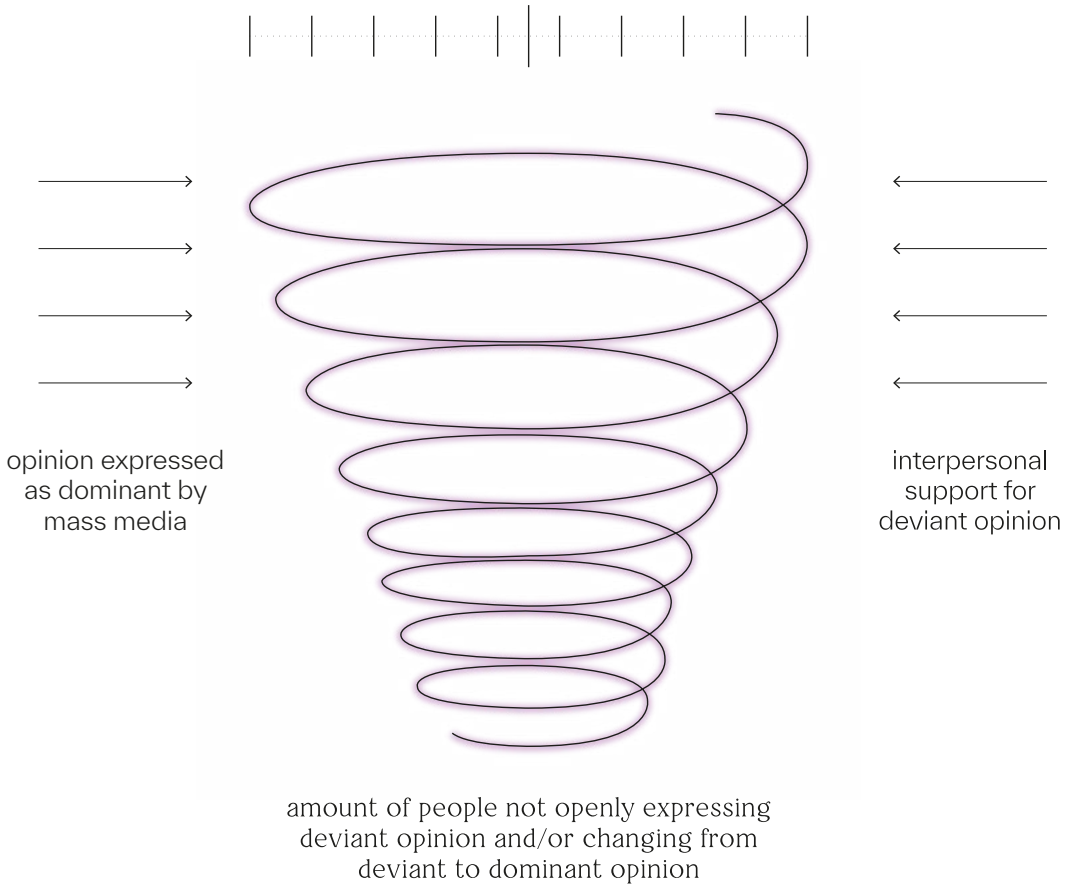
Drawing from the Spiral of Silence Theory (Figure 4.12) - proposed by Ambás and Sádaba (2021) and built upon the work of the German sociologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in the 1970s - corporate behaviour towards social conversations can be understood as an effort to achieve and maintain a good reputation among the public. The theory suggests that people tend to speak up or stay silent based on their perception of public opinion, fearing isolation and social rejection if they disagree with conventional norms. Similarly, by addressing social issues that are popular among the general public, such as racial justice and environmental sustainability, brands aim to establish a positive image that aligns with the prevailing sentiment among consumers and society. The whole fashion system is involved in this process, as not only brands, but also individual actors such as designers, models, and photographers are being pressured to voice their opinions. However, when social issues are publicly supported, current audiences demand higher transparency and authenticity and are prepared to harm brands' reputations in case their expectations are not met. Given the complexity of the current landscape where brands have to navigate endless potential benefits and risks, it is ever more crucial to maintain consistency to avoid crises and backlash.

4.3.4 The Pursuit of Authenticity and the Rise of Call-out Culture

The previous section of the research has demonstrated a common desire among fashion consumers to engage with brands that align with their values, and the consequent shift in expectations for fashion companies towards inclusivity, ethical practices, and overall participation in social conversations. In an industry often associated with superficiality, trends, and consumerism, the concept of authenticity has gained relevance as it offers a counterpoint. In response to these demands, implementing consumer-centric marketing strategies and engaging with political issues through corporate activism and cultural branding has become the norm for fashion businesses.

However, the quest for authenticity in fashion co-occurs with several challenges, as such ideals easily clash with the commercial nature of the industry and the pressure to meet market demands. As authenticity started gaining a central role in the fashion discourse, its meaning turned into a paradox. In the digital era, the mass production of information and its global accessibility through digital devices constantly challenges the notion of something truly being 'authentic' (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021). This controversy has caused many questions to arise, as scholars debate whether designers' and brands' support for social causes is driven by genuine commitment or if it is merely a response to peer pressure to be part of the political discourse. Among researchers, Ambás and Sádaba (2021) propose the following queries:

"Could it be that fashion activism used to be more authentic before social media made it socially acceptable to fight for a cause? And if so, what is preferable? A less mediatic movement but driven by pure conviction? Or an extremely visible movement in media outlets and social media that is driven only by a marketing strategy or peer pressure? Are companies and brands doing enough? Are we, as consumers, doing enough? Is using hashtags and posting on social media enough?"



↓ **Figure 4.12** The Spiral of Silence model, elaborated by German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974.

As emerges, while it is undeniable that fashion can produce impactful and thought-provoking statements, research to date has not yet determined the true repercussions of fashion activism in the digital era.

While further investigation is needed to understand such an impact, it is evident that communication crisis management has become a pressing concern for fashion stakeholders. The emergence of digital platforms has expanded people's media presence, making both public and private profiles more vulnerable to online public opinion, especially in the case of culturally sensitive content. Despite globalization, the existence of fashion scandals and the subsequent social media debates highlight the persistence of White Eurocentric values within the fashion system. These scandals serve as indicators of the systemic racism deeply ingrained within the industry, revealing that seemingly isolated incidents of insensitivity are manifestations of broader and longstanding issues that extend beyond the realm of fashion (Vänskä & Gurova, 2022).

To expand on this point, it is crucial to acknowledge that social media have been a double-edged sword for society: while they have connected communities to a new degree, at the same time they have questioned the reality of intercultural communication itself. Exploring the reasons behind this paradox, Chen (2012, p. 4) states that the advent of digital media has disrupted the co-existence and evolution of tradition and innovation at a synchronous pace, resulting in the "inability of traditional values to keep pace with the new cultural values produced by new media". This condition has produced cultural gaps both at an intergenerational level among people in the same culture and between different ethnic groups.

"The fragmented nature of new media has switched traditional cultural grammar, cultural themes, or cultural maps to a new pattern, resulting in the loss of traditional cultural logic" (Chen, 2012, p. 4).

This issue is further investigated according to three main aspects: the influence of national/ethnic culture on new media development, the effects of new media on cultural identity, and the impact of new media on different aspects of intercultural interaction. About the third point, in the last section of his investigation, Chen (2012, p. 6) argues that

"Cultural dissimilarities result in different ways in media representation on the individual or governmental level. Because the underlying order, perspectives and practical limitations of the media in any society are based on their cultural value orientations, the different forms of media representation tend to reflect the asymmetry of intercultural communication and inevitably lead to the problem of intercultural confrontation or conflict in interpersonal, group, and national levels".

This view is supported by Noris and Cantoni (2021), who expand the author's ideas by pointing out that cross-cultural psychology regards that culture affects a variety of elements, including individual behaviour, and people's responses to social media. The extent of this impact, together with the mediatization of digital media, can become the source of intercultural communication crises. Despite proving to be detrimental for fashion brands, communication crises and unintentional scandals still appear under-theorized, especially as most literature approaches the topic from a marketing perspective. However, a more comprehensive investigation has been conducted by Vänskä and Gurova (2022), who have analysed the underlying motivations behind social media crises and their impact on social - and not purely economic - transformations. To explore this subject, the authors introduce Stuart Hall's (1997) concept of representation, which assumes that "meaning does not inhere

in things but is constantly constructed and produced" (Vänskä & Gurova, 2022, p. 7). As a consequence, they assert that

"since fashion is constitutive of and constituted by society, the study of the fashion scandal is informative of conflicts over the social and cultural status of difference. Scandals indicate that fashion plays a critical role in the social life of people and it is connected multifacetedly to expressing identities. Fashion is a structure of social integration and differentiation and the cases reveal that much needs to be done for fashion to become truly inclusive, just and fair" (Vänskä & Gurova, 2022, p. 7).

In particular, referring back to the idea of mediatization, the occurrence of fashion scandals demonstrates the role of social platforms in constructing a new social order that has brought transformative changes in the fashion system, altering traditional interactions between companies and audiences. On this note, as indicated in earlier sections of this chapter, it is relevant to recall that the experience of fashion has always occurred through the use of 'mediated images'. Throughout history, fashion has been in fact consumed by the general public through a variety of media, including photography, magazines, and, more recently, digital devices. The evolution of online media technology has allowed democratization by granting access not only to fashion shows but also to behind-the-scenes moments that present designers' creative processes. The immediacy in uploading content onto social platforms has enabled most brands to maintain an active digital presence and to regularly update their audiences on the evolution of their collections before they are even presented on the runway. The shift in the balance of power between consumers and brands has disrupted the traditional structures of the fashion system, where fashion images and collections were filtered by gatekeepers such as buyers and fashion editors before reaching the wider public. On the contrary, the active role of consumers, now able to access information autonomously and rapidly, has forced fashion creators to think more carefully about how such images are conceived, produced, and communicated. According to Gerrie's analysis (2019, p. 12),

"without the restraints of advertiser capital or the editorial constraints of a broadsheet title, referential discussions about fashion criticism can be conducted freely. The democratic nature of the podcast, blog and social media account allow new voices to arise in an industry that has previously been centred on hierarchical systems of 'gatekeepers'".

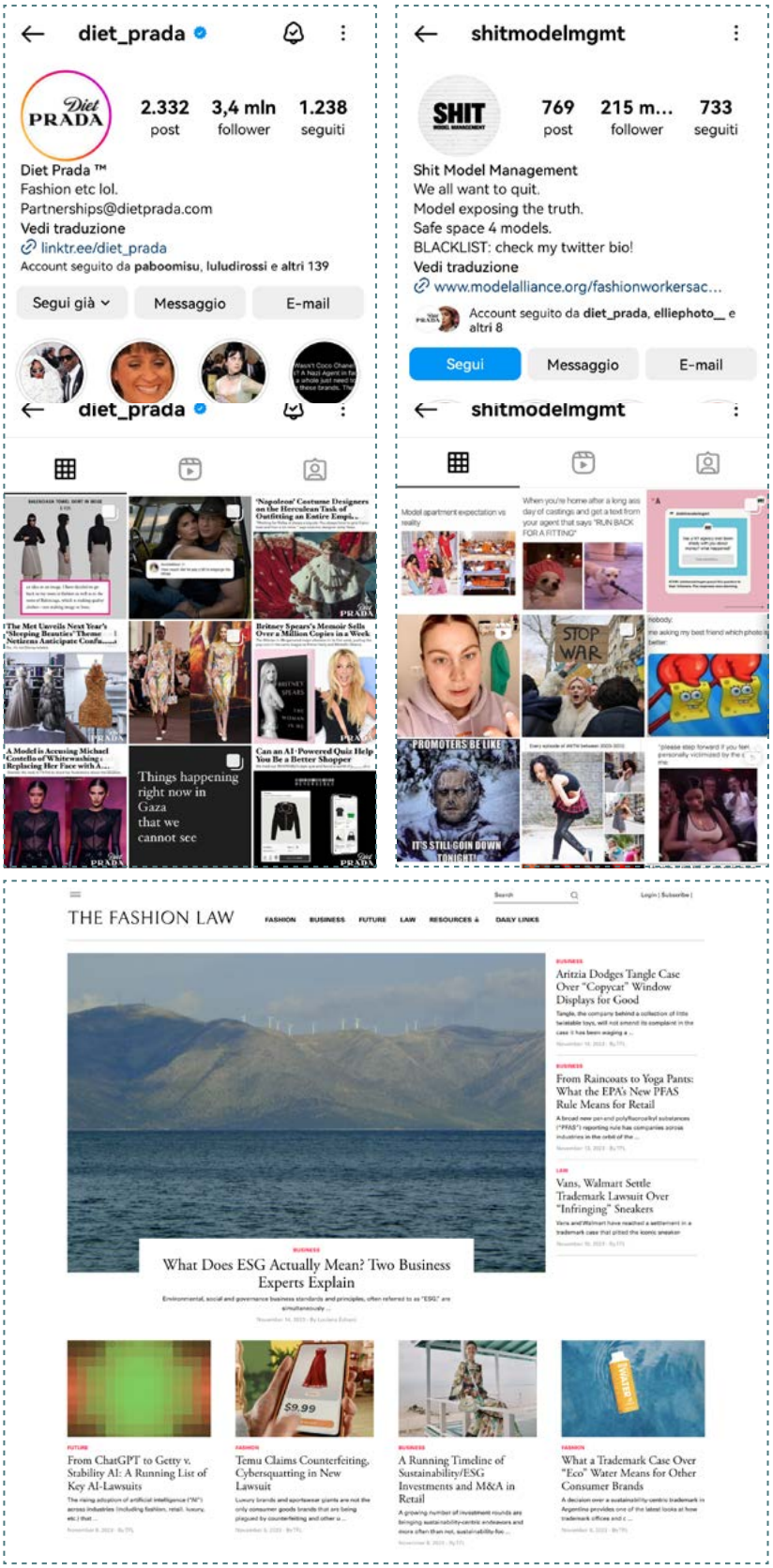
Indeed, such easily accessible information has exposed a lack of authenticity and industry issues, leading to the rise of what is known as 'call-out culture'. This cultural phenomenon typical of the digital era refers to the emerging independent voices that reveal the controversial sides of a conventionally hierarchical and closed system, introducing into public opinion themes such as sustainability, cultural appropriation, and diversity. Increased and globalised connectivity allows 'call-outs' to spread rapidly once public online, leveraging on their inherently viral nature. In the broader context of social media activism, 'call-out' culture undoubtedly plays a role in addressing the widespread tendency to justify negative behaviour and the use of offensive or non-inclusive language behind the concept of free speech. Within fashion, social media call-outs are often enacted by watchdog critics like the Instagram account Diet Prada (@dietprada) (Figure 4.13), regarded as the most influential online defender of accountability and integrity, The Fashion Law (thefashionlaw.com) (Figure 4.14), a website that covers legal industry issues, or Shit Model Management (@shitmodelmgmt) (Figure 4.15), exposing discrimination and abuse in the modelling world.

Instagram watchdogs have exerted a significant influence on brand communication, challenging conventional editorial criticism by disseminating fashion commentary able to engage

→ **Figure 4.13** Diet Prada

→ **Figure 4.14**
Shit Model Management

↘ **Figure 4.15**
The Fashion Law



younger audiences. They are in fact characterised by the use of ironic language to express their resentment towards the industry, frequently communicating through memes, which function as signifiers of intelligent humour within contemporary digital visual culture. Through humour, the meme format acts as an access point for contemporary audiences, becoming easily shareable across the Internet and playing the active role of the public, often engaged in content creation. Viral information also spreads through ephemeral content - like Instagram 'stories' - and live broadcasting - such as 'Instagram live' - which both allow instant global accessibility.

"The Millennial and Generation Z consumers who are the dominant audiences of these sites immerse themselves in the irony and deconstruction characteristic of the postmodern zeitgeist. Self-referential, intertextual memes have become a prime signifier of communication, as well as a democratic means of sharing information and the primary means in which Diet Prada communicates. The construction of a contemporary digital meme comprises of a photographic image or illustration with additional text that often re-contextualizes the initial connotations of the image and redefines it with references that humour the viewer in their juxtaposition, or alternatively highlights a social justice issue inherent to the collective critical consciousness of the zeitgeist. These groups of consumers relate to the wider move towards social justice activism that has occurred over the last decade" (Gerrie, 2019, p. 8).

According to this analysis, it can be stated that Instagram watchdogs have effectively been able to bridge the gap between serious fashion discourse and the lighthearted nature of internet culture. Despite this, it is relevant to note that, although engaging and effective, such messages can overshadow the seriousness of the issues being addressed. Moreover, when it comes to call-out culture, it is yet to be assessed whether its impact will endure in society or simply fade out with time. There have been rising concerns about the transparency of watchdog accounts, especially in navigating the effects of their collaboration with brands: as in the case of fashion editorials, it is risky and uncommon for critics to stay unbiased when economic relationships with brands are on the table. One of the main strategies employed as a consequence of call-out culture is boycotting, which happens at both economic and cultural levels. When controversies spark, brands are frequently subjected to a form of ostracism known as 'cancel culture', able to negatively impact businesses in terms of online attention and therefore revenue. This phenomenon can be understood as a collective agreement, typically expressed via social media, to completely reject and exert social pressure towards public figures and companies who have been involved in insensitive behaviour. While the term 'call-out culture' is generally accepted, 'cancel culture' tends to be framed under negative connotations and has become a topic of debate. In contrast to the interpretation of cancel culture as a way to promote accountability, it can be argued that it can often be unproductive or rather escalate into toxic behaviour. In the public domain of social media interactions, call-outs can become performative and self-indulgent, misused as a manner of showing perfect morals; on the other hand, due to the emotional distance created by digital platforms, they can lead to a form of dehumanisation close to cyberbullying, which could prevent online users to express their ideas in fear of being accused. While call-out culture has become a defining aspect of contemporary fashion and consumers seek honest cultural critique, the lack of regulations can easily lead to a situation of toxicity and superficial considerations.

In summary, it has been shown that the efficacy and longevity of call-out culture, as well as the impact of boycotts and cancel culture, are subjects that require ongoing evaluation and analysis. It is crucial to examine the complexity of the current fashionscape and consider the broader implications for the fashion industry and its stakeholders, including the ethical considerations of accountability, transparency, and the evolving relationship between brands and consumers in the digital era. Overall, this chapter has attempted to provide a summary of the literature relating to the dynamic nature of the fashion industry in relation to societal values and communication strategies within an increasingly digitized, globalized and mediatized environment. Building upon the insights gained from the examination of social media activism and its implications in the fashion industry, the next chapter aims to explore how social innovation can drive positive change in fashion communication and how its impact can be effectively assessed.

↘ **Figures 5.1 and 5.2**
Accessible Co-design Toolkit by designer Olivia Labattaglia, an example of how collaborative design fosters innovation in social impact.

↘ 5. Social Innovation and Impact Assessment in Fashion Brand Communication

Chapter 5 shifts the focus to the domain of social innovation and its application in the context of fashion brand communication. More specifically, it aims to explore how social innovation can drive positive change and how its impact can be effectively assessed in the fashion industry. To do so, the chapter starts by laying a foundation in the area of social innovation, examining the common features, main types, and processes of such initiatives, from problem identification to systemic change. From this theoretical base outlined in section 5.1, further social innovation dynamics within the design and fashion industries are explored in the following paragraphs, focusing on the role of creative communities and social movements. An essential section of this chapter is then dedicated to social impact measurement and assessing the social and environmental value of design. The final part of the chapter illustrates the output of this thesis, a Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication, representing a conceptual framework for understanding and evaluating the impact of social media activism in the fashion industry.

5.1 Overview of Social Innovation

The previous section has described how the fashion industry has undergone significant transformations in recent years, with the rise of social media activism as a driving force for change. The impact of social media on fashion brand communication has been significant, leading to changes in the way fashion companies interact with consumers. This shift towards socially responsible practices and collaborative societies has also contributed to the rise of social innovation in the fashion industry. This phenomenon has emerged as a relevant topic for investigation in the research and represents the main area of examination in the chapter that follows. Understanding social innovation is crucial in this context as it provides a framework for comprehending the environment and social dynamics within which fashion communication takes place.

The chapter begins with an overview of social innovation, providing a comprehensive understanding of its definition and main characteristics. It also explores how social innovations emerge and evolve through a dynamic and iterative process.

Next, the focus shifts to the actors who initiate and drive social innovation forward. After having defined the four main sectors in which the phenomenon takes place, it examines the role of social movements within this context, as well as the significant impact of social media as enablers and catalysts of social innovation. Building upon these insights, the enabling conditions for systemic change are investigated, pointing out the elements that support the growth of social innovations. Against this background, design for social innovation is emphasised as a way to amplify bottom-up initiatives, embedding them at an institutional level.

The following section is dedicated to exploring various approaches for assessing the social impact of initiatives. Especially with the growing influence of social media on societal change, it appears necessary to develop models for measuring the impact of these innovations in the wider context of society. By recognising the potential of social innovation to achieve societal impact, the effectiveness of social media activism in promoting social justice in the fashion industry can be assessed more accurately. Moreover, social innovation evaluation can offer a fresh perspective on the role of fashion in shaping cultural values and practices.

For these reasons, the final section of this study features the development of a social impact assessment model specifically tailored to fashion brand communication. The framework will take into account several factors, including the effectiveness of social media activism, its long-term influence, and the social, cultural, and environmental changes induced by these practices. By evaluating social outcomes, implications, and areas for improvement, it offers a tool to align fashion communication to societal values and make informed decisions on several dimensions. Ultimately, this can lead to more sustainable and socially responsible practices in the fashion industry, providing benefits to consumers and society as a whole.

5.1.1 Defining Social Innovation

In the last decades, social innovation has received considerable critical attention from policymakers and scholars worldwide. However, there has been a lack of consensus regarding its definition, with numerous interpretations of the topic in circulation. Such diversity can be attributed to the nature of social innovation as a practice-driven field, where understandings and meanings have emerged through practical experimentation rather than academic explanations. Such practice manifests differently across fields of action, sectors, and geographical contexts, thereby multiplying the different interpretations attributed to the concept. For these reasons, compared to the extensive literature on technological or business innovation, studies on social innovation remain relatively limited and often draw from other areas such as economics, public administration, and management studies. The boundaries of social innovation are so ambiguous and ill-defined, that Caulier-Grice et al. (2012, p. 4) suggest referring to "social innovation literatures" rather than "one distinct and unified body of knowledge".

Overall, the state of the art in social innovation studies reflects an active and multidisciplinary field that is continuously evolving to address contemporary social challenges. The concept of innovation has progressed over time, influenced by geopolitical and socioeconomic changes throughout history. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, do Adro and Fernandes (2020) provide a comprehensive review and synthesis of the evolution of innovation - including its origins, definition, key agents involved, contemporary relevance, and evolutionary perspective. Based on their historical study, the aftermath of the Second World War marked a turning point in innovation as the US government began supporting scientific and technological advancements through grants and research contracts. The emergence of personal computers and biotechnology industries in the 1970s further fueled small-scale private innovation, leading to the creation of high-tech startups and a transformation of the technology landscape. In this period, economists became highly interested in innovation due to continuous technological advancements and the growing pressure to achieve economic gain. The fast pace of progress hence created a sense of urgency to explore and understand the dynamics of innovation aiming to leverage its potential for financial growth. Initially, economists focused on the linear model of innovation, which portrayed innovation as a sequential process starting with basic research and progressing through development, production, and diffusion. However, the concept of innovation has evolved beyond market competitiveness, with European policymakers advocating for the concept of social innovation. Today, innovation is widely recognised as a driving force for development in market-based economies, being delivered by entrepreneurs from both business and social sectors.

The study of innovation, its values, and its application in social contexts has been a topic of research since the early twentieth century, particularly influenced by the works of Schumpeter (1927, 1928; 1934, 1935). Over the years, the understanding of innovation has evolved from a linear model to a systemic model of research and development (R&D) - with emphasis on the role of science in driving social transformation - to an economist model - with an exclusive focus on companies as actors of social innovation. Only in recent times, has the concept of innovation expanded to include various social agents beyond businesses. With this paradigm shift, innovation is embraced as a means to address societal challenges and improve the quality of life, recognising that multiple actors other than companies can be innovative.

Since its earliest appearances dating back to the 1960s, the idea of social innovation has in fact been used in diverse contexts, ranging from experimental research in the social sciences and humanities to social enterprise, technological innovations, corporate social responsibility, and open innovation.

According to Caulier-Grice et al. (2012), the new millennium saw a growing trend towards the topic, which emerged due to discontent with the focus on technological innovation in economic literature and policy. This common sentiment prompted a shift of attention towards social innovation at both policy and research levels. Along the same line, do Adro and Fernandes (2020, p. 26) state that

"the development of the ideas behind the SI seems to have arisen from intense dissatisfaction with some aspect of performance within society and organizations".

It was by recognising the limitations of institutions in tackling all societal problems that academics and intellectuals started to actively address contemporary social issues through innovative approaches. It is well established from further studies (Manzini, 2015; Murray et al., 2010; Pisano, 2015) that social innovation appeared as a response to complex social and demographic challenges and environmental concerns associated with climate change. Several authors (Fulgencio & Fever, 2016; Manzini, 2015; Selloni, 2017; TEPSIE, 2012) refer to these as 'wicked problems' which existing structures and policies fail to solve, leading politicians and business leaders to look towards social innovation as a way to develop alternative solutions to pressing global problems. Among these - characterised by complexity, multifaceted nature, involvement of multiple stakeholders, and inherent unsolvability - are

"the 'failure' of the modern welfare state, the failure of conventional market capitalism, resource scarcity and climate change, an ageing population and the associated care and health costs, the impact of globalisation, the impact of mass urbanisation" (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 5).

Social innovation is driven by a recognition of unmet needs, which can range from obvious necessities like hunger and shelter to more complex issues like racism or domestic violence. It is noteworthy that social innovation is closely linked with the sustainable development agenda, especially concerning social equity issues. However, the effectiveness of social innovation is highly context-dependent, taking place within broader social, cultural, economic, and environmental contexts. Furthermore, social innovations are not value-neutral but rather socially and politically constructed responses to urgent social demands, aiming to improve social interactions and overall well-being (Wolkowinski, 2016).

The recent economic crises have further highlighted existing social divides, stimulating a greater exploration of the concept of social innovation proved by the frequency of recent publications. The growing interest towards research on social innovation spans various disciplines and can be also attributed to increasing discontent not only with institutions but also with conventional for-profit business models (Do Adro & Fernandes, 2020). Traditional approaches by both governments and markets have proven insufficient, with market failures and outdated state models slowing down progress. For these reasons and due to the overwhelming cost of implementation, effective prevention measures result challenging to fulfil, requiring new paradigms and institutions that are open to change and innovation. While the public sector may encounter difficulties in tackling complex issues, and the profit-driven nature of the business sector

may not see them as valuable, civil society is instead actively exploring innovative approaches through social innovation. Social movements, activists, and voluntary organisations play a crucial role in identifying unmet needs and working towards innovative solutions. This has led to the emergence of new structures, hybrid organisations, and cross-sector collaborations.

In this environment, the diffusion of the social economy - value-driven and characterised by distributed networks, blurred boundaries between production and consumption, and collaboration - has reshaped the way economic systems function. Technology and culture are key drivers of this transformation, emphasising the human dimension, democratic participation, and individual relationships through new networked social forms. This change has also brought a renewed interest in personalisation and innovation around service journeys (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Arising as solutions to inadequately addressed social problems, social innovations offer viable approaches to challenging problems, breaking away from conventional economic models and proposing new ones based on diverse actors' motivations and expectations. Social innovations are in fact characterised by the creative recombination of existing assets to address social needs and foster new social relationships or collaborations. These initiatives aim to achieve socially recognised goals in innovative ways, simultaneously benefiting society and enhancing its capacity to act. The way they operate is by redefining problems themselves and introducing new ways of thinking and problem-solving strategies, leading to radical shifts in perspective. Consequently, they generate unforeseen positive outcomes and reshape the questions posed by the problems, offering alternative and effective solutions. In essence, social innovations leverage existing resources and capabilities to create new functions and meanings, challenging the mainstream views and providing transformative approaches to complex social issues (Manzini, 2015).

Despite ongoing investigations into the concept of social innovation driven by global socioeconomic and environmental shifts, the field remains fragmented and lacks a comprehensive theoretical framework, highlighting the need for further theoretical systematisation. Without a well-defined theory and solid evidence, it appears challenging to determine the extent to which social innovation can effectively address current social challenges. The scarcity of social innovation studies in the literature can be attributed, in part, to the inherent challenges of studying this complex phenomenon using traditional methods employed in the social sciences (Do Adro & Fernandes, 2020). Social innovations are intricate and unfold over significant periods of time, making it difficult to define their nature, origins, and the necessary conditions for successful implementation. Moreover, social innovation is a diverse and multifaceted field that lacks a universally accepted definition, as it is primarily driven by practice-led experiences rather than systematic academic research (TEPSIE, 2012).

As a consequence, the term 'social innovation' lacks a consistent definition and has been conceptualised in a number of different ways. Rather than a specific notion, social innovation is seen as an approach to frame the changing power dynamics and blurred boundaries between the state, the market, family, and community in the wider context of governance challenges. Several sources (Selloni, 2017; TEPSIE, 2012; Wolkowinski, 2016) suggest that it might be considered a 'quasi-concept' due to its hybrid, unprecise and flexible nature. Operating in both academic and policy domains, it demonstrates some intellectual basis but also limitations in terms of analysis and empirical evidence. While this indeterminate quality of social innovation may be criticised

on theoretical and practical grounds, it is also what makes social innovation interesting and useful. Different definitions of social innovation highlight various aspects, in particular concerning the notion of 'social' in the term. Scholars refer to it in terms of either social value, meeting social needs, creating new social relationships, focusing on well-being, or social impact. Furthermore, social innovations can occur at different levels or scales, such as micro, meso, and macro levels. While the specific interpretation and typologies of these levels may differ among researchers and practitioners, it is widely acknowledged that social innovation can take place at various levels of society and across different sectors (Selloni, 2017).

Although variations in definitions have been proposed by different authors, there is a common understanding that social needs and the promotion of social inclusion are fundamental aspects of this concept and serve as an underlying principle across these diverse perspectives. Comprehensively, the concept revolves around the generation and implementation of new ideas about people and their interactions within a social system (Mumford, 2002). According to this perspective, it is viewed as a distinctive type of creativity that gives rise to new institutions, industries, policies, and social interaction modalities.

One of the most comprehensive analyses of the various applications of the term 'social innovation' comes from TEPSIE (The Theoretical, Empirical and Policy foundations for building Social Innovation in Europe), a research project funded by the European Commission aiming to advance the understanding of social innovation and its potential to address societal challenges through theoretical and empirical research. The first work package of the research programme, "Overview of the System of Social Innovation" (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012), provides a theoretical and methodological framework to ensure consistency of definitions across the area and the project. Here, the concept has been identified to describe the following uses:

→ processes of social transformation;

→ a model of organisational management;

→ social entrepreneurship;

→ the development of new products, services and programmes;

→ a model of governance, empowerment and capacity building.

To begin with, social innovation is used to indicate processes of social change, referring to the roles of civil society, social entrepreneurs, and businesses in promoting economic growth and social inclusion. In the case of companies, this definition emphasises the notion of corporate social responsibility and involves the potential redefinition of the purpose of corporations around shared value, including social and environmental needs besides financial ones.

The second definition mainly comes from business management literature, where social innovation describes a component of business strategy that involves

"changes in human, institutional and social capitals that lead to organisational efficiency and improved competitiveness" (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 6).

Thirdly, social innovation is closely linked to social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, and the work of social or

EXAMPLES OF LITERATURE TOPICS	EXAMPLES OF LITERATURE TOPICS
Processes of social change and societal transformation	→ Role of civil society in social change → Role of social economy and social entrepreneurs → Role of business in social change
Business strategy and organisational management	→ Human, institutional and social capital → Organisational efficiency, leadership and competitiveness → Sustainability and effectiveness of non-profits
Social entrepreneurship	→ Role of individuals in creating social ventures → Behaviours and attitudes related to social enterprise → Businesses focused on social objectives with any surpluses re-invested
New products, services and programmes	→ Interrelationships between actors and their skills, competencies, assets and social capital in developing programmes and strategies.

civic entrepreneurs. In this sense, it describes the development of new and innovative approaches to address complex social challenges. This perspective is based on the process of identification, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities to satisfy social needs through innovative means.

Fourth, the term depicts the practical ideation and implementation of new products, services, and programmes that address social needs. This viewpoint is largely adopted in relation to public sector innovation and gained significance in response to austerity measures and welfare state changes.

The final perspective on social innovation focuses on governance, empowerment, and capacity-building dynamics, emphasising the 'process dimension' and examining the interactions among different actors in the creation and implementation of specific programmes and strategies. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the five broad uses of the term.

Drawing on the literature review conducted, Caulier-Grice et al. (2012, p. 18) develop a core definition of social innovation:

"Social innovations are new solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act."

The proposed definition highlights several key themes in the understanding of social innovation. These are depicted as the core elements of the concept, building on a previous classification of what is distinct about social innovation, created by Murray et al. (2010). The core elements of social innovation (Table 5.2. Caulier-Grice et al., 2012) relate to:

→ novelty;
→ implementation in practice;
→ addressing social needs;
→ beneficiary engagement;
→ transformation of social relations.

First, social innovations need to have some element of novelty, whether it's in the field, sector, region, market, user, or in the way they are applied. However, the focus should be on the

impact and measurable improvements they bring compared to existing solutions, rather than solely on absolute novelty. In fact,

"social innovations are not just new solutions, they are new solutions that work better than existing practices and therefore bring about measurable improvements for the populations they serve" (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 10).

↖ **Table 5.1** Summary of the five broad uses of the term social innovation (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 8)

↑ **Table 5.2** Summary of the core elements of social innovation (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, pp. 20–21)

A second distinctive element in social innovation concerns its practical application. In the realm of innovation studies, a clear conceptual distinction is made between invention and innovation: while the former refers to the formulation of a new idea or improvement, the latter regards the implementation of that idea. Against this background, it is essential to distinguish promising ideas from actual social innovations, as these should demonstrate potential for long-term financial sustainability. As previously stated, for a social innovation to be considered successful, it must have greater effectiveness than existing solutions. This effectiveness should be measured by tangible improvements in outcomes, such as quality, user satisfaction, adoption rates, cost reduction, or broader impacts like well-being and social cohesion. To this end, it is fundamental for social innovators to effectively capture and communicate the impact of their initiatives, using both quantitative and qualitative measures that align with the underlying social values the innovation aims to promote.

Third, a core characteristic of social innovation is its explicit focus on addressing social needs. To define such needs, it is crucial to understand that they are subjective, context-dependent, and subject to ongoing discussions and debates. Adopting a needs-based approach allows for a more constructive exploration of social innovation compared to solely focusing on societal problems or social rights: understanding unmet needs and how people and communities develop innovative solutions to address them can drive social innovation. The benefit of this approach is that it considers both deficiencies and assets within individuals and communities.

Finally, social innovation involves a process that enhances society's capacity to act and bring about positive change. This is achieved through various means, by creating new roles, relationships, and assets, and leads to changes in social relations, particularly in terms of governance. Social innovation often involves empowering vulnerable, marginalised, and underrepresented groups by increasing their participation and

CORE ELEMENTS	DESCRIPTION
Novelty	Social innovations are new to the field, sector, region, market or user, or to be applied in a new way
From ideas to implementation	There is a distinction between invention (developing ideas) and innovation (implementing and applying ideas)
Meets a social need	Social innovations are explicitly designed to meet a recognised social need
Effectiveness	Social innovations are more effective than existing solutions – create a measurable improvement in terms of outcomes
Enhance society's capacity to act	Empowers beneficiaries by creating new roles and relationships, developing assets and capabilities and/or better use of assets and resources.

↘ **Figure 5.3** Screenshot of Seamly2D software displaying a customised digital pattern.

→ **Figures 5.4 and 5.5** Student training at Fab Textiles during the educative program Fabricademy.

influence in decision-making processes. This aspect of social innovation, enhancing societal resilience and empowerment, is under-researched and under-explained despite being acknowledged as crucial.

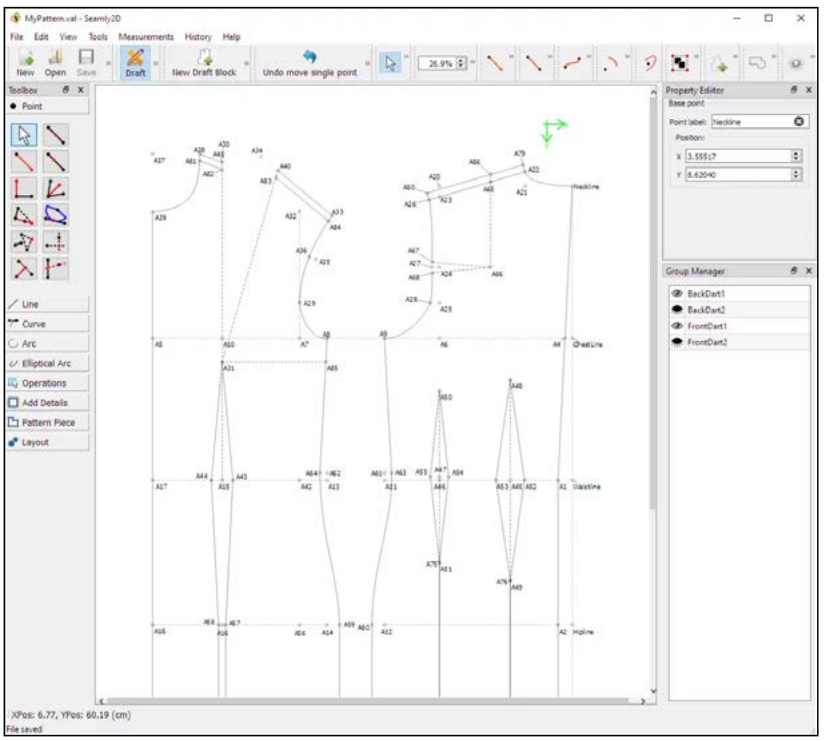
5.1.2 Common Features and Types of Social Innovation

Research within the TEPSIE project (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012; TEPSIE, 2012) also identified several common features of social innovation initiatives, including:

→ Cross-sectoral;
→ Open and collaborative;
→ Grassroots and bottom-up;
→ Pro-sumption and co-production;
→ Mutualism;
→ Creates new roles and relationships;
→ Better use of assets and resources;
→ Develops assets and capabilities.

First, social innovations emerge in different sectors and frequently involve collaboration among actors from various areas. They often transition between sectors during their development and can be adopted by different organisations, driving cross-sectoral impact.

Second, social innovations foster inclusivity and collaboration, engaging diverse actors. This aspect has been enhanced by digital transformation, since advancements in information and communication technologies have facilitated mass participation and collective production, transcending traditional market structures. This open and collaborative approach is exemplified by initiatives such as open-source projects, crowdsourcing platforms, and new models of intellectual property based on access rather than ownership. Examples in the fashion sphere include open-source patterns and design platforms such as Seamly2D (Figure 5.3), an open-source fashion design software that enables patternmakers and tailors to create custom-fit and size-inclusive digital sewing patterns. These initiatives redefine traditional notions of fashion production and ownership, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable industry.

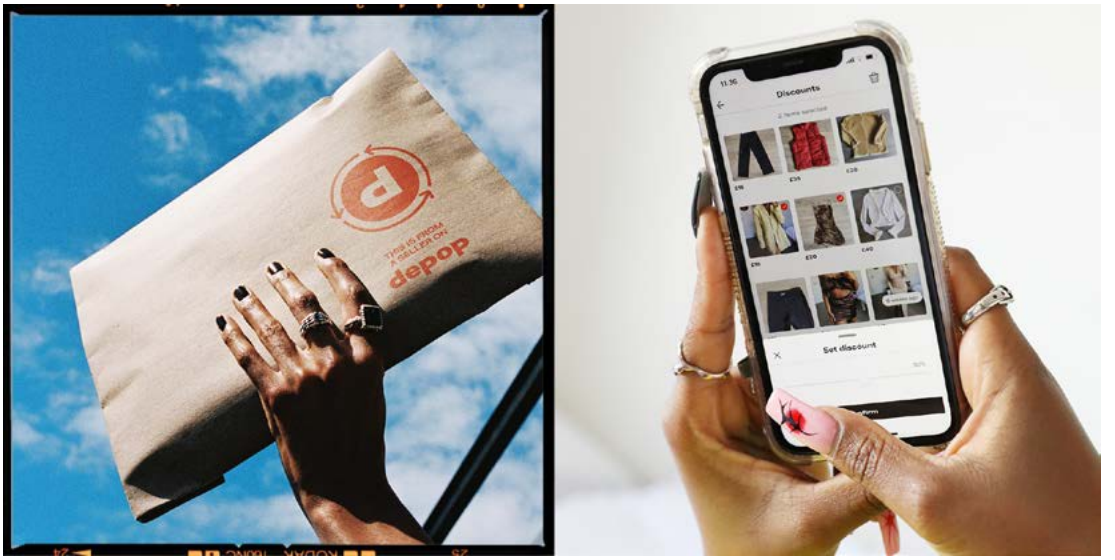


Similarly, Fab Labs such as Fab Textiles (Figure 5.4; Figure 5.5), a specific initiative within Fab Lab Barcelona, provide a platform for designers to experiment with new materials, offering digital tools and technologies to create textile products, and "producing experimental digital open source couture" (Fab Textiles, 2020).

Third, social innovations are often characterised by bottom-up, grassroots approaches: these deviate from traditional models and embrace distributed and decentralised systems where innovations happen at the periphery and are connected by networks.

Next, social innovations involve pro-sumption and co-production. Contemporary users are active participants and contributors, often referred to as 'prosumers'. In the social sphere, individuals are involved in co-production, shifting responsibility and resources from professionals to users.

Following that, mutualism in social innovation promotes mutual dependence for individual and collective well-being. It is embodied by various forms of mutual organisations like co-operatives and peer-to-peer networks such as Etsy (Figure 5.6), an online marketplace that focuses on artisanal, vintage, and unique items. The platform has gained significance in the fashion industry as it promotes handmade and sustainable fashion and empowers independent designers and small businesses by offering them a service to reach customers directly.



→ **Figure 5.6** Screenshot of the Etsy interface, showcasing a variety of handmade products.

↑ **Figure 5.7** Package and user interface of Depop, a fashion marketplace for vintage and second-hand items.

↘ **Figure 5.8** Screenshot of the Vestiaire Collective interface, an online platform for pre-owned luxury fashion.

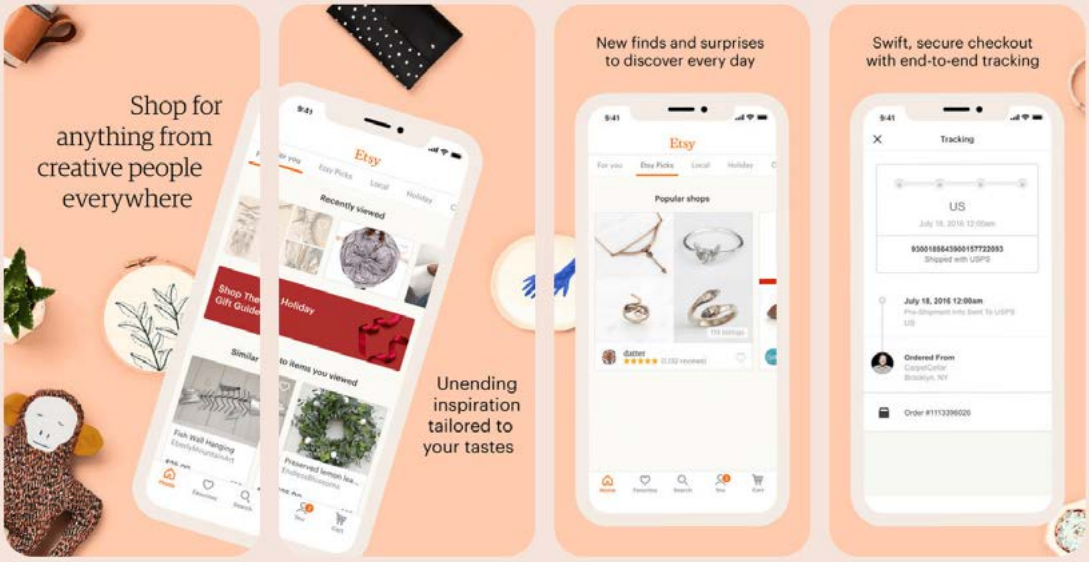
Additionally, due to their collaborative nature, social innovations can create new social relationships in a variety of ways, leading to new forms of governance, promoting collaboration, and increasing the inclusivity and participation of marginalised groups. By creating new roles and social relationships, they enhance the capabilities of users and enable them to better satisfy their needs in the long term.

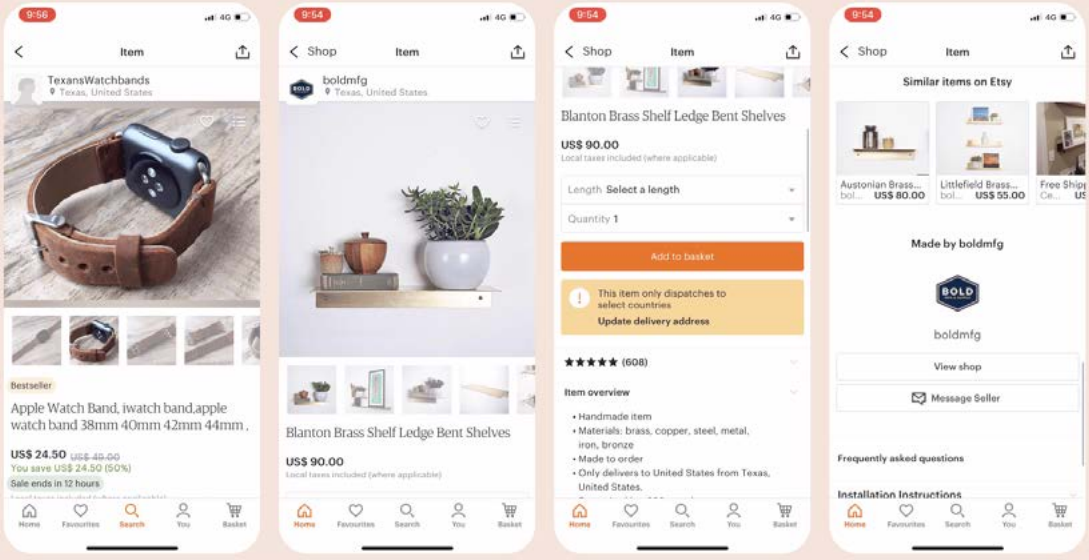
Next, social innovation leverages under-used or neglected assets and resources in several forms, including latent skills of communities, intangible financial resources, or physical spaces. By recognising these assets, they generate positive outcomes for all stakeholders involved. In fashion, online marketplaces like Depop (Figure 5.7) and Vestiaire Collective (Figure 5.8) enable individuals to sell and buy pre-owned clothing, extending the lifespan of fashion items and promoting circular fashion.

Finally, social innovations aim to enhance the capabilities of individuals, empowering them to meet their needs and achieve their desired lifestyles. This asset-based approach emphasises people's active role in finding solutions and challenges power dynamics, fostering self-determination. For instance, the "Who made my clothes?" (Figure 5.9) and subsequent "I made your clothes" (Figure 5.10) campaigns promoted by the Fashion Revolution movement encourage transparency and accountability, empowering consumers to make informed choices. This case is further analysed in Appendix A.

Table 5.3 recaps the common features of social innovation which have been outlined.

Besides outlining core elements and common features of social innovation, Caulier-Grice et al. (2012) distinguish a few types of social innovations, recalling a classification previously established by Schumpeter (1934). A fundamental notion at the base of the typology is the differentiation between incremental and radical innovation. The former extends on existing knowledge and resources, often implemented by established actors in a specific sector. In contrast, the latter result in a significant shift from previous offerings, requiring new knowledge and resources. As such, they have the potential to be both disruptive of existing products and services and generative of further innovation. Table 5.4 depicts the typology of social innovations, enriching Caulier-Grice et al.'s (2012) identification with examples which exist within the realm of fashion.


Shop for anything from creative people everywhere
Unending inspiration tailored to your tastes
New finds and surprises to discover every day
Swift, secure checkout with end-to-end tracking


Item
TexansWatchbands
Texas, United States
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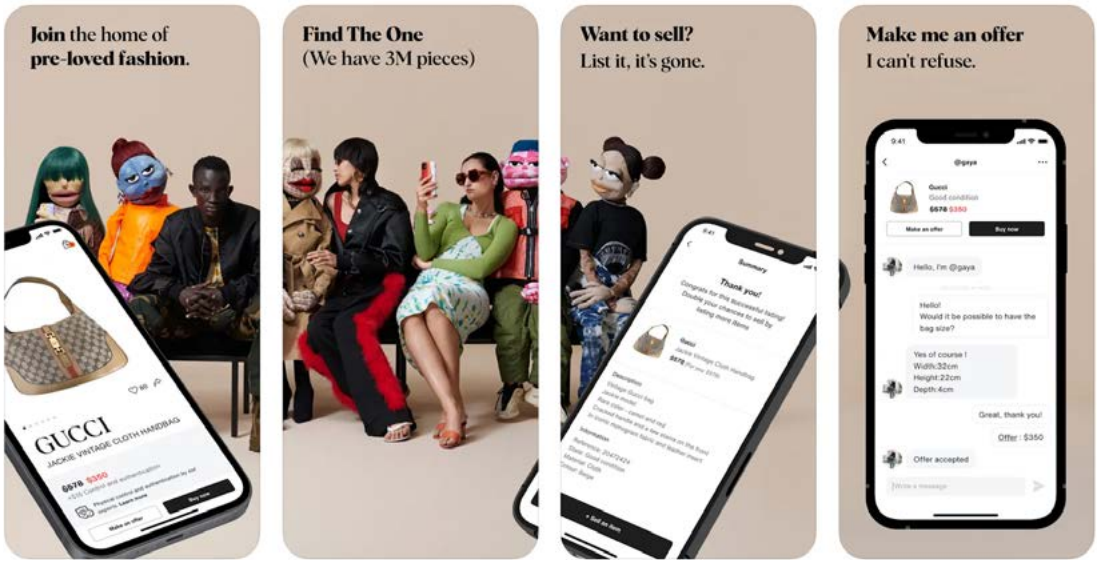
Apple Watch Band, iwatch band,apple watch band 38mm 40mm 42mm 44mm ,
US$ 24.50
You save US$ 24.50 (50%)
Sale ends in 12 hours
Shop
boldmfg
Blanton Brass Shelf Ledge Bent Shelves
US$ 90.00
Length Select a length
Quantity 1
Add to basket
This item only dispatches to select countries
Update delivery address
(608)
Item overview
Handmade item
Materials: brass, copper, steel, metal, iron, bronze
Made to order
Only delivers to United States from Texas, United States.
Similar items on Etsy
Austonian Brass...
US$ 80.00
Littlefield Brass...
US$ 55.00
Made by boldmfg
View shop
Message Seller
Frequently asked questions
Installation Instructions


Join the home of pre-loved fashion.
Find The One (We have 3M pieces)
Want to sell? List it, it's gone.
Make me an offer I can't refuse.
GUCCI
JACKIE VINTAGE CLOTH HANDBAG


FASHION REVOLUTION
Who made my clothes?
Who made my clothes?
#WHOMADEMYCLOTHES
FASHIONREVOLUTION.ORG


I made your clothes
PICT URE
#WHOMADEMYCLOTHES
FASHIONREVOLUTION.ORG

COMMON FEATURES	DESCRIPTION
Cross-sectoral	Occur at the interfaces between sectors and involve actors from across sectors.
New social relationships and capabilities	Social innovations are developed 'with' and 'by' users and not delivered 'to' and 'for' them. They can be identified by the type of relationships they create with and between their beneficiaries.
Open, collaborative and experimental	Production by the masses - large numbers of people working independently on collective projects without normal market structures and mechanisms.
Prosumption and co-production	Blurred boundary between producers and consumers.
Grass-roots, bottom-up	Distributed systems where innovation and initiative are dispersed to the periphery and connected by networks.
Mutualism	Notion that individual and collective well-being is obtainable only by mutual dependence.
Better use of assets and resources	Recognition, exploitation and coordination of latent social assets
Development of capabilities and assets	Participatory approach enabling beneficiaries to meet needs over the longer term

↑ **Table 5.3** Summary of the common features of social innovation (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, pp. 23–24).

TYPES OF SOCIAL INNOVATION	EXAMPLES IN FASHION
New products	Innovative eco-friendly textiles (Orange Fiber, Tencel, Piñatex)
New services	Fashion rental platforms (Rent the Runway)
New processes	Peer-to-peer collaboration and crowdsourcing (Threadless)
New markets	Fair Trade fashion initiatives (Patagonia's Fair Trade Certified program)
New platforms	New legal or regulatory frameworks or platforms for care (Good On You)
New organisational forms	Social enterprises in the fashion industry (Ozara, Artisan Fashion)
New business models	Social franchising model (Goodwill Industries)

↑ **Table 5.4** Typology of social innovations. Adapted from (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 25).

↖ **Figure 5.9** Left to right. Carry Somers and Orsola De Castro, founders of the Fashion Revolution movement, ask "Who made my clothes?", demanding transparency from fashion brands.

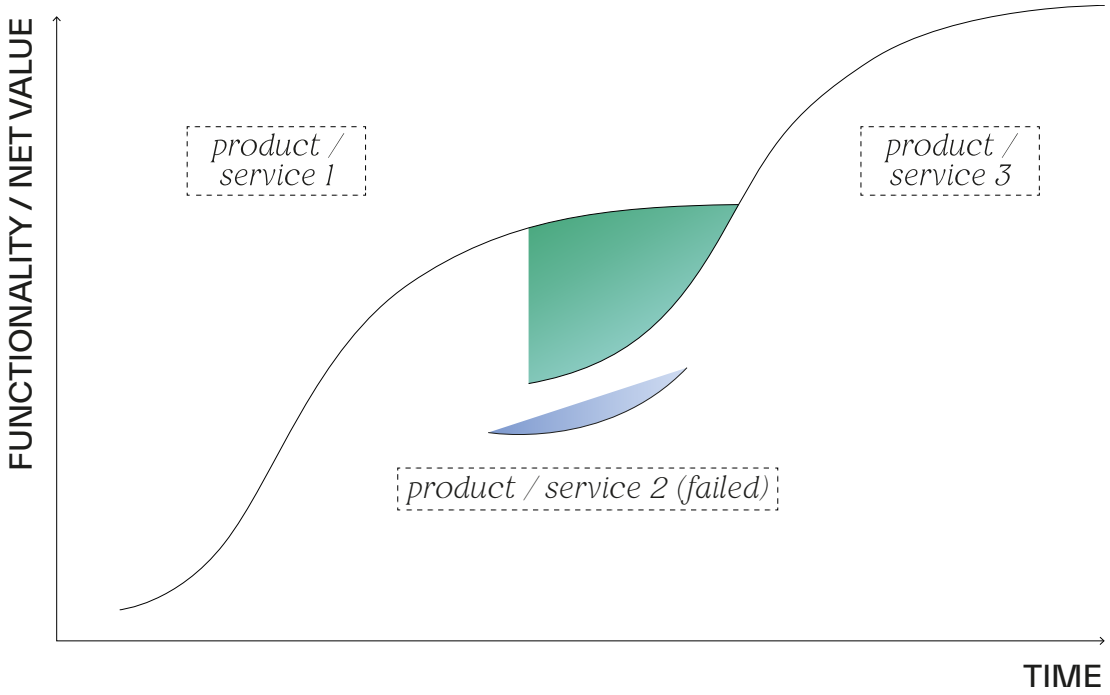
← **Figure 5.10** Worker at Picture Organic Clothing holds an "I made your clothes" sign, representing the brand's commitment to sustainability.

The types of social innovation identified by TEPSIE provide a broad understanding of the different approaches and initiatives used to address social challenges. However, it is crucial to note that these are not mutually exclusive and often intersect in practice to create a positive impact. This intersectionality reflects the complex nature of the 'wicked problems' social innovation strives to tackle: usually, effective solutions require a combination of approaches and the participation of numerous actors. In this sense, innovation can not be considered as a result of spontaneous invention, but rather as a process that unfolds through intricate stages of experimentation.

5.1.3 The Process of Social Innovation: from Problem Identification to Systemic Change

Understanding the process of social innovation is important to comprehend how the types of innovation previously discussed are designed, implemented, and diffused to bring about social change. This process involves a series of interconnected activities and steps that enable the transformation of social challenges into innovative solutions. Despite the progressive contribution of different scientific communities to the field of social innovation - starting with pure investigators, followed by researchers from business schools, and finally, economists - the analysis of how social innovations develop has received less attention compared to those on business and technology innovation (Wolkowinski, 2016). Existing analysis has primarily focused on case studies, often illustrating successful examples and relying on empirical investigation. As a result, the understanding of broader patterns and stages of social innovation has remained limited and inconsistent until the appearance of more comprehensive studies. This traditional approach has been challenged by Mulgan (2007) and Murray et al. (2010) who outlined process-oriented models for social innovation. Both perspectives highlight the interactivity of the innovation process and the synergic advantages of distributed networks, allowing for a well-rounded classification.

Mulgan (2007) identified four steps in the social innovation process, providing a framework for understanding the progression of social innovation initiatives from problem identification to implementation, evaluation, and long-term impact. The first phase involves generating ideas by understanding needs and identifying potential solutions. As widely recognised, the innovation process begins by identifying unmet needs and potential solutions. These needs can arise from various sources, such as informal social movements, existing voluntary organisations, individual social entrepreneurs, rising citizen expectations and aspirations, or demographic change. It is then crucial to connect needs to new possibilities, which can involve technological advancements, innovative organisational structures, new knowledge or evidence. Solutions also arise from the combination of existing ideas in novel ways: some organisations use formal creativity methods and rely on the support of professionals such as developers and designers to encourage lateral thinking and generate innovative solutions. This brings social innovations to the following stage, developing, prototyping and piloting ideas, which consists in testing promising ideas in practical settings. Social innovations often undergo early implementation to gather feedback and refine the concept, as quick prototyping allows for multiple iterations and improvements before achieving successful outcomes. The third stage is the scaling up and diffusing of good ideas, which follows their assessment: once an idea proves its value in practice, it can be scaled up and diffused to reach a wider audience. Social innovations typically follow an 'S curve' pattern (Figure 5.11),



↑ **Figure 5.11** 'S Curve' of innovation (Mulgan et al., 2007, p. 17).

starting with slow growth among a small group of supporters, then experiencing rapid expansion, and eventually reaching late adopters, saturation, and maturity.

Finally, innovations continue to evolve through ongoing learning and adaptation. As organisations gain experience, they may discover unintended consequences or identify new applications for the idea. The initial possibilities evolve into more explicit and formalised concepts as best practices are established. Core principles are consolidated, facilitating effective communication. As the idea is implemented in different contexts, it further evolves and combines with other innovations, generating new tacit knowledge within organisations. This cycle of learning and synthesis leads to the emergence of simpler and more refined solutions.

Murray et al. (2010) propose a different overview of the process of social innovation, building upon extensive research and expanding Mulgan's model. In "The Open Book of Social Innovation", they provide a six-stage model to further capture the complexity and nuances of the social innovation process. This framework (Figure 5.12), widely regarded as one of the most authoritative sources in the field of social innovation, includes:

→ **1. Prompts, inspiration, and diagnoses**: recognising the need for innovation and identifying root causes;

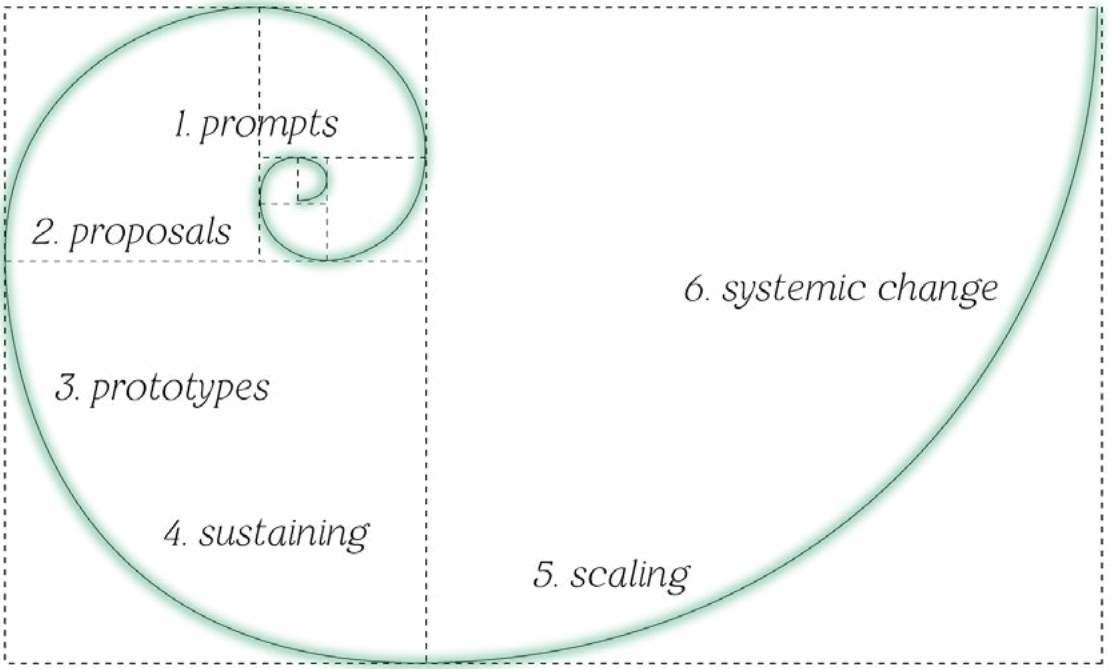
→ **2. Proposals and ideas**: generating ideas to address the identified need or problem;

→ **3. Prototyping and pilots**: testing ideas through practical implementation and a learning-by-doing attitude;

→ **4. Sustaining**: embedding the idea as everyday practice and securing long-term financial sustainability;

→ **5. Scaling and diffusion**: expanding the reach and impact of successful innovations;

→ **6. Systemic change**: transforming underlying structures and systems to achieve lasting, meaningful change as the ultimate goal of social innovation.



↑ **Figure 5.12** The process of social innovation (Murray et al., 2010, p. 11).

Whereas the model represents a valid analytical tool to describe the process of social innovation, it is crucial to highlight that such a process is not strictly sequential and that these stages are often overlapping. The authors state:

"Often, implementation, action and practice precipitate new ideas, which in turn lead to further improvements and innovations. And feedback loops exist between every stage, which makes the process iterative rather than linear, which is why we represent this process visually with a spiral rather than a linear diagram" (Murray et al., 2010, p. 34).

The process of social innovation often begins with a triggering experience, event, or new evidence that highlights a social need or injustice. Triggers for innovation can arise from unexpected external changes, such as crises, new technologies, and emerging evidence in research. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation in the fashion industry, leading to innovations like the adoption of digital patternmaking, which diffused as a response to the challenges posed by the pandemic and helped reduce waste by minimizing the need for physical samples and enabling more efficient production processes. In other cases, prompts derive from longer-term crises that reach a critical point and require immediate action. Additionally, social innovators may actively seek prompts by using techniques like ethnography or gathering customer feedback to understand the needs of the population they aim to serve. Analysing data and employing ethnographic methods can in fact provide insights into the underlying causes and different needs associated with the problem. Overall, prompts serve as a starting point for identifying areas where innovation is needed: by recognising and responding to these triggers, innovators can effectively stimulate workable solutions and drive meaningful change. They play a crucial role in shifting the focus from symptoms to root causes, prompting the exploration of new perspectives, and making previously hidden or marginalised problems visible. In today's media-driven society, capturing attention becomes a valuable resource to propel social change and raise awareness about pressing issues. Making social phenomena visible through mapping and visualisation sheds light on patterns that may have remained unnoticed by those living or governing within them. In essence, prompts serve as the catalysts that initiate the process of social innovation.

Proposals and ideas are the next crucial step in the process of social innovation. In contrast to what is described in Mulgan's model, prompts and proposals correspond to separate stages according to Murray's theories. In this phase, the generation of ideas can occur organically as a natural progression from the identification of the need itself, or it may involve the exploration of new practices or creative approaches to problem-solving. Some of the methods employed to suggest potential solutions are specifically designed for this purpose, while others are adapted from neighbouring fields. Innovation often stems from finding inspiration in diverse sources through an interdisciplinary combination of knowledge and ideas, and unique connections between seemingly unrelated elements. Alternatively, bringing people together through participation and codesign plays a significant role in imagining and developing solutions in cooperation. This can be facilitated through techniques like Design Thinking, leveraging community strategies, and embracing collaborative approaches such as crowdsourcing. Similarly, open innovation leverages the collective intelligence of crowds. It relies on principles such as collaboration, sharing, self-organisation, decentralisation, transparency of process, and diversity of participants. Methods such as calls for ideas, competitions, and other participatory processes foster idea generation, deliberation, and broad participation as well. By embracing open innovation, social innovators can explore a diverse range of experiences and insightful creativity to generate innovative ideas for social needs.

The stage of prototyping and piloting is crucial in social innovation, as it involves testing promising ideas in real-world practice. The main actors in this process are citizens, associations, businesses, and start-ups working individually or in networks to address the needs of communities and promote social cohesion, environmental protection, and economic prosperity (Wolkowinski, 2016). As previously stated, innovation does not translate in a straightforward and sequential process, since ideas are iteratively adjusted through experimentation. This happens in a series of trials and errors, with the solution undergoing constant refinement and innovators learning from experience. Concerning this, contemporary social innovation often demands quick action rather than detailed planning and strategies which may require excessive amounts of time. Rapid prototyping allows innovators to address feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and other specific challenges. By actively engaging in this stage, social innovators address practical considerations to ensure effectiveness and sustainability (Murray et al., 2010). As added by Caulier-Grice et al. (2012), through the process of testing, constant interactions are formed between users and suppliers, while building an empirical base for attracting funding.

In the fourth stage, the solution transitions into established initiatives in everyday practice. Sustaining innovations encompasses screening promising ideas and identifying income streams to ensure long-term financial sustainability. For ideas that successfully pass the phase of prototyping, implementation requires creating suitable economic models and business plans while striving to spread the innovation's social impact. In this phase, organisations often face the challenge to maintain openness and credibility as well as their commercial interests and desire for collaboration. Otherwise, it is common for tensions to arise between the desire to maximise the reach of the innovation and the need to ensure the organisation's financial survival. Such pressure can be highlighted in the case of Diet Prada, the Instagram watchdog account responsible for introducing a new approach to holding brands accountable for their actions, exposing plagiarism and unethical practices in

the fashion industry. As the page grew in popularity, it started collaborating with some of the very brands it once called out, raising concerns among its audience and compromising the perception of their impartiality and dedication to the cause. Outside the public sector, the fourth stage also includes determining an appropriate organisational form, such as informal structures, private companies, co-ops, associations, or charities. This is crucial as ownership structures impact an innovation's mission achievement and management dynamics.

At the subsequent point, different routes to growth exist for social innovations, ranging from organisational expansion through licensing or franchising to more organic processes of diffusion through emulation and adaptation. While scaling involves deliberate growth, diffusion often happens through emulation and rapid adoption. Boycott actions, often seen in social media activism against fashion brands, are examples of how social ideas can spread and create impact through emulation rather than organisational growth, making them a notable form of social innovation over traditional scaling approaches within the realm of consumer activism. Unlike the private economy, the social economy favours collaboration and quick diffusion of innovation. This preference for collaborative networking arises from its orientation toward social missions and leads to a complex diffusion process characterised by interaction and modification. According to an interpretation provided by Murray (2010, p. 83), this can be defined "as 'generative diffusion' - 'generative' because the adoption of an innovation will take different forms rather than replicate a given model, 'diffusion' because it spreads, sometimes chaotically, along multiple paths". This definition captures the essence of how social innovations spread and evolve, emphasising the adaptability and flexibility of social innovations as they are implemented in different contexts and a chaotic manner. This acknowledges the intricate nature of the diffusion process, where ideas may be adopted and reshaped as they travel through different networks and communities. Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in supporting social innovation at this stage, ensuring it aligns with the public good. Five key elements for scaling pathways include readiness of the innovation and organisation, availability of resources, receptivity to the innovation's demand, consideration of risks, and the measurement of social impact to assess returns (Wolkowinski, 2016). However, contextual to this phase is measuring the effectiveness of innovations to determine whether innovations should be scaled up or not. Challenges to diffusion include incomplete information and inadequate models for replication, while on the contrary governments can play a role in accelerating the adoption of social innovations through regulation and policies (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Despite the existence of social impact assessment methods, the field has seen limited progress due to confusion about their purpose: impact data can serve investors and organisations, and help understand long-term social change and impact. Although diverse social impact assessment methods have been designed, their use for decision-making has not been consistent (Murray et al., 2010). A more detailed account of social impact assessment will be provided in the following sections of this chapter.

Despite being enacted only by a few social innovations, systemic change represents the last stage and ultimate goal of the process. It involves transformative innovations that radically reshape the fundamental systems on which we depend, given that the inherent aim of social innovation is to challenge existing norms and practices, involving a complex interplay of culture, consumer behaviour, business practices, legislation, and policy. Systemic change goes beyond product or service innovation and

refers to shifts in concepts, mindsets, economic flows, power dynamics, and involvement from all sectors of society - business, government, civil society, and households. The development of the green movement - initially driven by social movements and non-profit organisations, and later encouraged by academia and government regulations, to finally reach business adaptations and changing consumer behaviour - serves as an example of systemic change with opportunities for innovation across various sectors and institutions. Given their intricate nature, systemic innovations are mostly triggered by periods of upheaval or crisis rather than times of stability. Specifically, they can emerge suddenly due to crises or disruptive technologies, but more often they are the result of gradual processes that change infrastructures, behaviours, and cultures over time. The complexity of systemic transformation also makes it challenging to define specific tools, as each system has unique properties. However, common strategies to support it include:

→ forming progressive coalitions;
→ developing shared diagnoses and visions;
→ growing practical examples;
→ establishing new rights;
→ training professionals with new skills and attitudes;
→ substitute conventional technologies that impede innovation;
→ accessing expertise and evidence;
→ implementing legal and regulatory mechanisms;
→ empowering beneficiaries of the new system.

Both top-down efforts and community-driven initiatives have been used to promote systemic innovation, with social movements often serving as a fundamental support for systemic alternatives. Systemic innovations, which involve significant changes in power dynamics and perspectives, often extend beyond the boundaries of individual organisations. Successful social change frequently relies on coalitions and networks, where a wider network of stakeholders plays a crucial role, in contrast to the firm-centric approach commonly seen in business innovation. To be successful, innovation must be guided and cultivated, growing through collaboration between creative individuals and powerful institutions. The blending of ideas from different sources drives innovation, and the tools and methods used for innovation continue to evolve through creative experimentation and recombination.

In summary, the process of social innovation involves a series of interconnected stages that include the identification of social needs, the development of innovative solutions, and the implementation and diffusion of these solutions to generate a positive impact. Understanding this process is essential for effectively driving and supporting social innovation efforts. However, the actors driving these initiatives also play a critical role in bringing about positive social change. The actors driving social innovation include individuals, organisations, communities, and even broader societal movements, all of which operate across various sectors, contributing their unique perspectives, resources, and capabilities to address social challenges. Only by taking into consideration the motivations, interactions, and collaborations behind these actors, it is possible to understand the dynamics and potential of social innovation. For this reason, the following section will explore the roles and contributions of these actors in enacting social innovations.

5.2 Exploring Social Innovation Dynamics: Actors and Their Interactions

5.2.1 The Social Economy: Social Innovation Across Four Sectors

Social innovation is often a result of complex interactions between diverse initiatives, involving both bottom-up actions operated by communities and top-down interventions by institutions, organisations, or companies. These interactions create hybrid processes where different actors collaborate to achieve social change: while governments and companies can coordinate with social innovation projects, the core innovation comes from society itself (Do Adro & Fernandes, 2020). The hybrid nature of these processes becomes more prominent as the scale of change increases. It highlights the importance of combining grassroots efforts with support and collaboration from various stakeholders to drive meaningful and significant social innovation (Manzini, 2014).

In other words, social innovation transcends traditional boundaries among the sectors of the economy, rather referring to innovation in generating social outcomes regardless of their origin. According to Murray et al. (2010), social innovation embraces a kind of economy, which differs from traditional practices of consumption and production of commodities and can be referred to as 'social economy' (Figure 5.13). Creating the conditions for social innovation involves handling the main features of the social economy: intensive use of distributed networks, blurred boundaries between production and consumption, emphasis on collaboration and interactions, as well as on values and missions. It is important to note that the social economy does not constitute a standalone entity, but rather operates as a hybrid within the four sub-economies of the market (Figure 5.14):

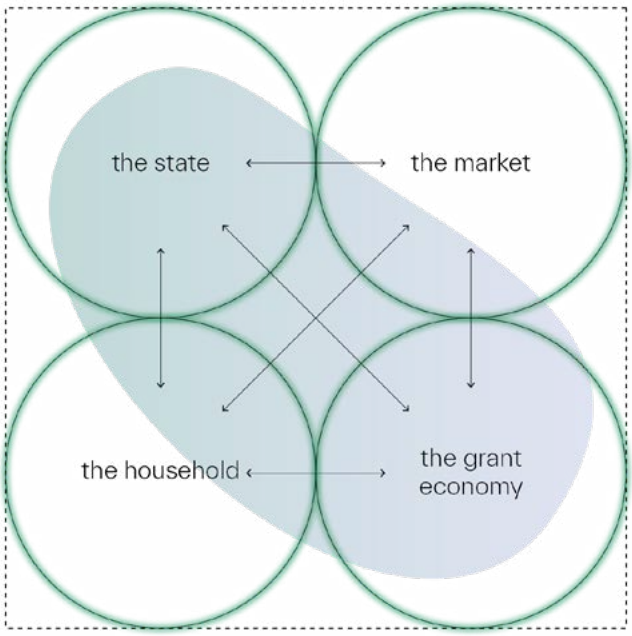
→ the **non-profit** sector, or grant economy;
→ the **public** sector, related to the state;
→ the **private** sector, related to the market;
→ the **informal** sector, or household.

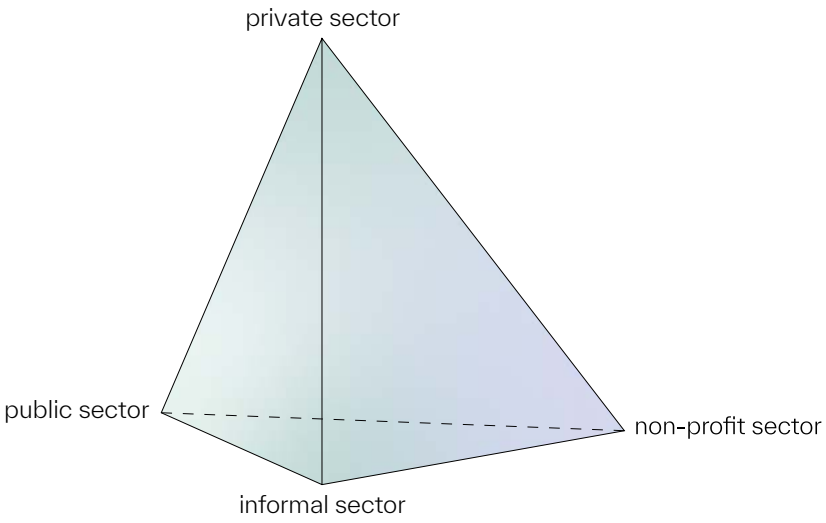
The non-profit sector, or third sector, plays a crucial role in addressing social needs through campaigns and advocacy. However, it faces restraints such as limited ability to scale and fragmentation. Financially, it depends on grant funding, which can be unpredictable and vulnerable to state budget cuts, making long-term planning challenging (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). It is exemplified by organisations like Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which works in promoting the transition to a circular economy in various sectors, including fashion, or Humana People to People, which has implemented innovative initiatives in fashion, such as upcycling, skill development, fair trade practices, community-based enterprises.

The public sector has the potential to drive systemic change through its access to resources, large budgets, policy regulations, and implementation networks. However, its complex structure, a lack of dedicated budgets for innovation and a low tolerance for failure limit the possibilities of experimentation in innovation. Additionally, governments can shape conditions for innovation in

→ **Figure 5.13** The social economy (Murray et al., 2010, p. 143).

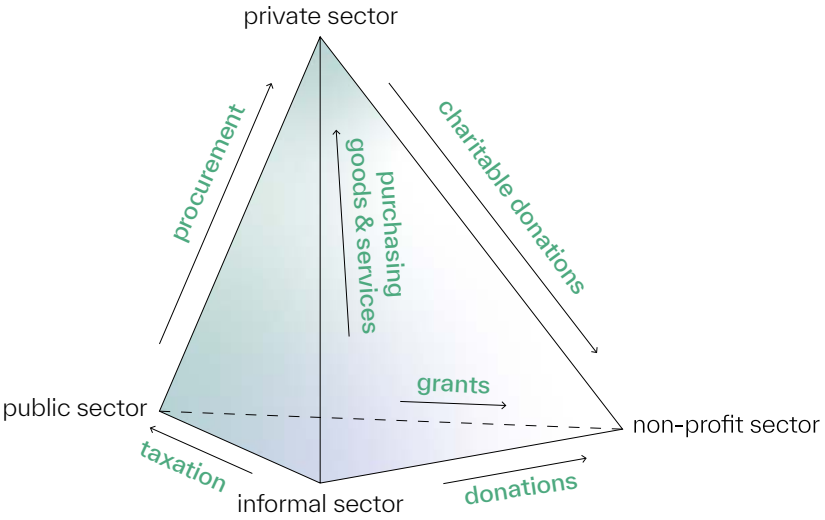
→ **Figure 5.14** The four sectors of the economy (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 27).





other sectors through policies, funding instruments, regulatory and legal frameworks, and tax incentives. Public sector funding also supports R&D in social and environmental fields (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). For instance, the Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE) is part of the London College of Fashion and operates as a fashion tech business incubator and accelerator.

The informal sector refers to the activities of individuals, families, and communities that focus on meeting social needs and are not captured by the other three sectors. These include both physical and online forms of volunteering, collaboration, and collective action. These activities are rarely conceptually aggregated in a single sector, despite sharing similar characteristics: they operate through informal networks, use time as a unit of value, and run on voluntary participation and trust-based relationships (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Additionally, this sector plays a significant role in social innovation due to its grassroots nature, which has been emphasised by the diffusion of networked technologies, which empowered more people to organise and innovate outside of traditional organisations, as in social media activism. In the fashion industry, one prominent example in the informal realm is represented by the Slow Fashion Movement. This emerged as a response to the negative social and environmental impacts of fast fashion and advocates for ethical production and responsible consumption. Despite its



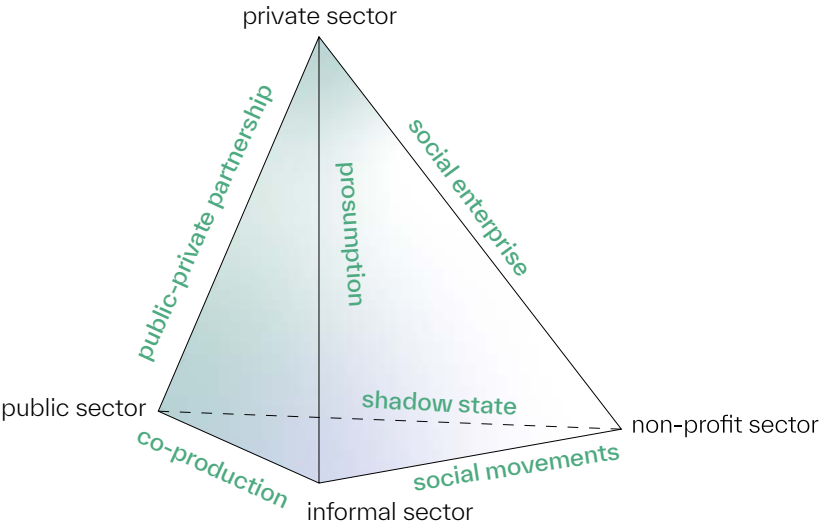
→ **Figure 5.15** Flows of finance between sectors (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 31).

potential, the informal sector faces challenges related to limited time, capital, resources, and organisational capacity required for scaling and growth.

While each sub-economy has its distinct characteristics, the social economy brings them together through its focus on social goals and ethics. It facilitates connections and interactions, mapped as six interfaces (Figure 5.15) which explore the dynamics of exchange between the four sectors (Murray et al., 2010). The boundaries between the four sectors are not fixed, and many organisations in the field of social innovation operate as hybrids, incorporating elements from multiple sectors (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Because social innovation frequently occurs in the overlapping spaces between sectors (Figure 5.16), understanding the dynamics of their relations is crucial.

Among the six interfaces depicting the relations between sectors, those between the informal and other sectors offer rich opportunities for innovation and collaboration. For example, as reported by different scholars (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2010; TEPSIE, 2012), the interface between households and the private market includes purchasing products and services, as well as engaging individuals as workers. However, it extends beyond these operations, on one hand with social movements forming alliances with private sector entities to advocate for systemic changes, and on the other hand with user-led innovation and the activities of prosumers. Similarly, the interface between the grant economy and the household economy involves reciprocal movements of donations, volunteering, and the supply of various services, while the public-informal sector interface concerns partnerships between individuals and professionals in co-production. Understanding different exchanges among the sub-economies is crucial to inspire the development of social innovations, as it reveals areas for co-creation and co-production, promoting partnerships and collaboration between different sectors, and contributing to the creation of an enabling environment to effectively address social needs.

To achieve wider impact, social innovations typically need to be standardised through the market or receive support from the state, since systemic innovation involves a network of interconnected innovations where each component relies on the others. In this sense, scaling a single intervention is insufficient to bring about systemic change. It rather requires the creation of multiple, complementary, and interdependent



→ **Figure 5.16** Blurring of boundaries between sectors (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012, p. 32).

innovations that work together to have meaningful transformative effects (TEPSIE, 2012).

To this end, supporting the growth and development of informal community initiatives is crucial for fostering social innovation, since the household economy serves as a significant source of innovation, despite being under-recognised. Informal associations and social movements originating in households can in fact exert pressure on larger institutions and eventually transition into the grant, public or market economy. As issues related to behaviour change became more prominent in social discourse, the household economy has acquired significance and grown over time. Within the sector, new trends have emerged, driven by mutual action and collaboration between individuals, facilitated by open-source software and web-based social networking. These decentralised networks have generated innovative solutions outside the realms of the market and the state, developing their own protocols and codes of conduct, and presenting new opportunities and challenges for addressing social and economic issues. However, the impact of the social economy extends beyond the virtual realm. To fully ensure its benefits, it is necessary to reconsider the relationship between the household economy and the market and state, which represent its two main sources of finance. This involves addressing issues related to topics such as working time distribution, valuing voluntary labour, social and educational services, and public safety. Making radical changes in these areas is necessary to unlock the potential of the social economy in addressing current and future issues (Murray et al., 2010).

5.2.2 Agents of Social Change: the Role of Creative Communities and Social Movements

As previously discussed, social innovation relies on the power of people and their collaborative efforts to address social challenges and inequalities. While social entrepreneurs play a crucial role in tackling poverty and injustice, local authorities provide support and trust in collaborative settings. The involvement of the public sector appears essential in arranging effective policy and creating the necessary conditions for innovation to succeed, especially when facing all-encompassing issues such as environmental damage. As suggested by Wolkowinski (2016), this requires a culture of cross-fertilisation, along with collective efforts in determining shared social objectives and the best solutions to achieve them. According to the author, the complexity of contemporary challenges lies in the dynamic, social, and generative nature of our society,

"dynamic in that the space between cause and effect become further apart in time and space; social in that there are more choices to be made between more people with more perspectives than ever before; generative in that the future is unknown and emergent, and we are tasked with creating the future as it emerges in improvisational and adaptive ways" (Wolkowinski, 2016, p. 7).

Along similar lines, Manzini (2014) mentions that the transformation of contemporary societies is concurrent with the evolution of the essence of social innovation itself, resulting in previously unthinkable possibilities to address global challenges. A second focal aspect in Wolkowinski's review (2016) is connected to the concept of 'people power'. Frequently, innovations are deeply intertwined with the existing status quo, implying that they are adaptations to current situations, often detached from real-world practices and grassroots experiences. Therefore, according to the author, the focus should be on empowering communities and individuals by bringing back creativity and ownership: the pursuit of emancipation is crucial for citizens to gain autonomy while maintaining a balance with existing institutional and commercial powers.

The emphasis on restoring creativity and ownership resonates with the idea of creative communities researched by Manzini (2014) and Selloni (2017). These are groups of people who challenge conventional thinking and problem-solving by imagining, developing, and managing innovative solutions. They incorporate the power of cooperation, creative recombination of existing resources, and self-reliance rather than relying on systemic changes. These communities play a crucial role in shaping new and sustainable ways of living, given that bottom-up social innovation breaks away from mainstream models of thinking and doing to address everyday questions that the dominant production and consumption system fails to answer. These innovative solutions are often driven by creative communities that combine existing products, services, and knowledge in original ways. In particular, Selloni (2017) views creative communities as a constructive form of citizen activism, where citizens are active agents in the creation of well-being. In referring to activism, the adopted definition is the one proposed by Fuad-Luke (2009), which emphasises the idea of taking actions to instill change at a social, cultural, and political level. Recalling his classification of five key areas of contemporary activism - financial, natural, human, manufactured, and social capital - Selloni (2017) focuses on activism initiatives in human and social capital. More specifically, she explores a form of activism related to finding solutions rather than conventional protest against the status quo. From this point of view, citizen activism may be viewed as a form of participation in public life and a basic right of democracy, leading towards more effective programs and policies.

In exploring this perspective from the lens of social innovation, it is insightful to recognise the role of social movements, often rooted in the household economy. Many of agents and innovations appeared as a result of processes of co-creation and co-implementation, referring to instances in which citizens actively participate in the development and implementation of services and activities that were once the responsibility of governments (Do Adro & Fernandes, 2020). As social innovation empowers individuals and communities, social movements enable collective mobilisation and favour participatory, emancipated, and grassroots approaches.

On this matter, Smith (2014) examined the literature on social movement research to provide valuable perspectives on the subject of social innovation. The analysis revealed three potential areas of engagement between the study of social movement

and research on social innovation: viewing social movements as a form of social innovation; considering social movements as environments for innovative activities; examining social innovation as a form of social movement.

While social movements can be considered as transformative social innovations, Smith (2014) argues that reducing social movements to the concept of social innovation alone overlooks important aspects. Movements such as environmentalism and feminism have played a crucial role in introducing new problem framings, concepts, and solutions to emerging social issues, also contributing to cultural change and the formation of new social identities. For these reasons, they can provide valuable insights into social innovations' emergence, development, and impact. However, social movements involve more than generating changes in practices. They demand accountability from authority figures and institutions, create new identities and social understandings, shape public conversation, foster solidarity among social groups and communities, challenge opposite interests, and reframe the context of operation for other social actors. As a consequence, to fully understand the diverse nature of social movements, it is more beneficial to draw upon extensive social movement research rather than considering them exclusively as social innovations.

Secondly, social movements are analysed as a milieu for innovative activity, as they play a significant role in cultivating and shaping social innovations. They can either directly generate a range of innovations or put pressure on other actors, leading to the development of social innovations in response to their demands. Social movement research provides insights into how these innovations are shaped by the movements, including their identification, problem framing, resource involvement, opportunities for progress, and impact on existing institutions. It also examines partnerships with other actors and the consequences of these relationships.

Finally, social innovation can be seen as a social movement in itself. It incorporates new concepts, problem framings and regulations for social issues, as well as the collaboration of a network of actors committed to its development. Studying social innovation as a social movement involves understanding its organisation, frameworks, collective actions, and impact. It also explores opportunities and challenges faced by the movement, including structural changes and disruptions to established institutions. According to this perspective,

"transformation is beyond the agency of any social innovation alone. It is to be found more fully in broader movements and their work upon the structures in our societies" (Smith, 2014, para. 4).

5.2.3 How Technology Shapes Social Innovation: The Rise of Distributed Systems

In recent years, there has been a shift in individual behaviours towards greater collaboration in life projects, breaking away from traditional routines and actively experimenting with more participative ways of living and producing. This growing movement represents a significant wave of social innovation, which has received support and encouragement from various authors (Fassi et al., 2013; Manzini, 2014; Selloni, 2017; Wolkowinski, 2016). As previously explored, social innovation arises when individuals, expertise, and resources converge in new ways, leading to original insights and opportunities. Today, these occurrences appear as a product of societal evolution and the increased interconnectedness of people's lives. The convergence of social

innovation with technology, such as the Internet, mobile phones, and social media, has surely played a role in enabling the creation of innovative services that not only offer solutions to challenging social problems but also challenge conventional relationships between citizens and institutions.

The potential to revolutionise these relationships is related to the idea that any change in contemporary human societies is inherently both social and technical. On this matter, Manzini (2015, p. 16) states that

This implies that the emergence of distributed systems

"we should talk about innovation in the sociotechnical system triggered by a social change", meaning that **"by introducing a new social form that uses existing technologies but uses and combines them in new ways, it effectively changes the technical system".**

challenges both traditional production models and their technological foundations. Unlike centralised systems, these distributed systems necessarily require consideration of the social context in which they operate. They have emerged in various waves of innovation, gradually converging to create a new paradigm. The first wave introduced the shift from hierarchical to networked information systems, enabling distributed intelligence, facilitating changes in socio-technical organisations, and giving way to fluid and horizontal structures of society (Manzini, 2015). Additionally, the ongoing technological innovation in manufacturing processes presents opportunities for distributed systems able to revolutionise production and consumption networks.

Based on studies conducted within the TEPSIE project (2012), technological advancements have lowered barriers and improved connectivity, reach, and scalability for social innovations, with ICT affecting social innovations in three main ways:

→ 1. Supporting: digital technology enhances the efficiency of existing social innovation efforts through improved connectivity and simplicity.

→ 2. Enabling: ICT facilitates the emergence of new forms of social innovation by enabling different combinations of online platforms, virtual communities and offline networks; it leads to innovative solutions thanks to decentralised collaboration and large-scale problem-solving.

→ 3. Transforming: ICT has the potential to disrupt governance structures and reshape societal and business models; it introduced the capacity to drive systemic change and approach social and economic challenges in entirely new ways.

The value chain of digital tools and platforms in social innovation comprehends various stages, ranging from content creation and identifying social needs to implementing solutions. While digital technologies are commonly used in the early stages, other parts often rely on traditional and physical activities. Furthermore, ICT has become a fundamental tool for scaling and disseminating social innovations: with a conscious use of online platforms, social innovators can rapidly spread their initiatives within local communities, specific sectors, or target groups and ultimately achieve greater impact (TEPSIE, 2012). It is noteworthy that, although technological advancements have allowed for significant contributions to social innovation, the field continues to evolve and adapt to changing scenarios. As digital technologies continue to progress, the potential for them to drive social innovation and address societal issues remains promising.

This evolving landscape of distributed systems has given

way to the emergence of unprecedented social forms and collaborative organisations, with different characters and purposes but which all require the active participation of all parties. Among these, one particular form of social innovation emerges at the intersection of grassroots organisations and social networks, which share a common trait: their content and existence are sustained by individuals who devote their energy, culture, enthusiasm, and design capabilities. Historically, these two types of organisations have operated in separate contexts. While grassroots organisations typically arise from local groups working together to address tangible issues, social networks primarily exist in the digital realm, facilitating the flow of information. Despite this, the last decades have witnessed an increasing blur of boundaries between the two (Manzini, 2015). Online platforms have revolutionised collective action and mobilisation by providing new tools and infrastructures to accelerate the spread and impact of bottom-up initiatives, fostering a culture of innovation and transformation. Grassroots organisations have integrated information and communication technologies, adopting dedicated digital media as organising platforms. Simultaneously, social networks have transitioned from purely digital spaces to hybrid spaces where digital and physical dimensions coexist.

Bottom-up campaigns for social change have flourished in the digital landscape, with the emergence of spaces for organising and coordinating actions and amplifying the voices of individuals. These platforms enable the aggregation of actions at the community level, allowing for collaborative purchasing, management, and gifting of goods. The social economy places emphasis on diffusing and sharing knowledge and information rather than restricting access to it: open licensing and the creation of a commons of information promote broader access and encourage innovative uses of resources (Murray et al., 2010). In this context, users have become active 'prosumers', while mutual interest groups and support structures have formed, fostering engagement and collaboration among citizens. Informal trading systems and informal currencies have also emerged as a way to valorise household time and facilitate economic exchange within communities.

This convergence has led to the emergence of hybrid social forms that bridge the virtual and real worlds, proving to be mutually beneficial. On one hand, social networks find purpose in grassroots organisations by connecting with real-life problems and facilitating meaningful actions; on the other hand, grassroots organisations leverage social networks as tools to enhance their effectiveness, durability, replicability, and scalability, therefore increasing their impact on conventional modes of thinking and doing. As Manzini (2015, p. 82) states,

At the same time, Ruiz de Querol et al. (2021) point out

"the positive loop between these two trajectories is extending the area of overlap, where a new wave of sociotechnical innovation can be generated and unprecedented digitally supported organizations can flourish".

how the widespread adoption of social media platforms has significantly shaped the expectations of citizens and stakeholders when engaging with public authorities, highlighting the need for effective institutional responses to address emerging socio economic challenges. Despite the potential of social media to alleviate the risk of a 'global governance crisis' (Ruiz De Querol et al., 2021, p. 2), challenges persist in making use of the potential of bottom-up networks, particularly within the government sector, where existing processes often slow down innovation on a social dimension. Overcoming inertia and enhancing collaboration among diverse stakeholders appears crucial, especially as research

emphasises the role of effective communication mechanisms in shaping individual behaviour and enabling self-organisation for the success of collaborative grassroots actions (GBH Forum Network, 2010/2014). In the current landscape, the availability of social media platforms catalyses bottom-up networks of innovation, bringing together a wide range of actors, including social entrepreneurs, communities, non-profit organisations, for-profit entities, and government agencies.

As the field of social innovation progresses, embracing new cultures and practices becomes increasingly crucial to address pressing public policy issues and drive positive change in society. The convergence of social and technological changes, along with the emergence of distributed systems and hybrid social forms, reflects the interconnectedness and potential of grassroots networks and digital platforms in driving transformative social innovation. This evolution has led to the appearance of creative communities, groups of people driven by a desire to create positive change in unique ways. By fully understanding the dynamics and driving forces behind these communities it is possible to gain further insights on how to support social innovation. For this reason, the next section investigates the origin of their collective efforts and the enabling conditions for systemic change.

5.2.4 Relational Dynamics in Social Innovation: Triggers and Conditions for Systemic Change

The emergence of creative communities within the context of social innovation has been a transformative force in shaping new and sustainable ways of living. At the same time, from Selloni's (2017) perspective, creative communities are emerging as a symptom of a transformation, manifesting the decline of individualism and a return to tribal times, characterised by affective and emotional investment. Technological development supports this 'sentiment of tribal belonging' (Selloni, 2017, p. 4) in the form of micro-groups, typical of the network paradigm. In a way, this concept repurposes ancient, pre-industrial models based on trade/exchange and community conviviality. Therefore technologies are not only used as mere instruments but re-employed in original ways, putting products and services that exist on the market into alternative systems. Moreover, thanks to the free circulation of information on the web, creative communities have access to knowledge that would otherwise have remained exclusive to expert systems. In the context of the sharing economy, understood as

"a possible evolution of creative communities into groups that regulate their exchanges through the use of digital platforms and the adoption of a peer-to-peer approach" (Selloni, 2017, p. 5),

creative communities have transformed into actual social innovators. Due to this evolution, these groups now seek to reconnect with institutions and change power dynamics looking for support from public administrations.

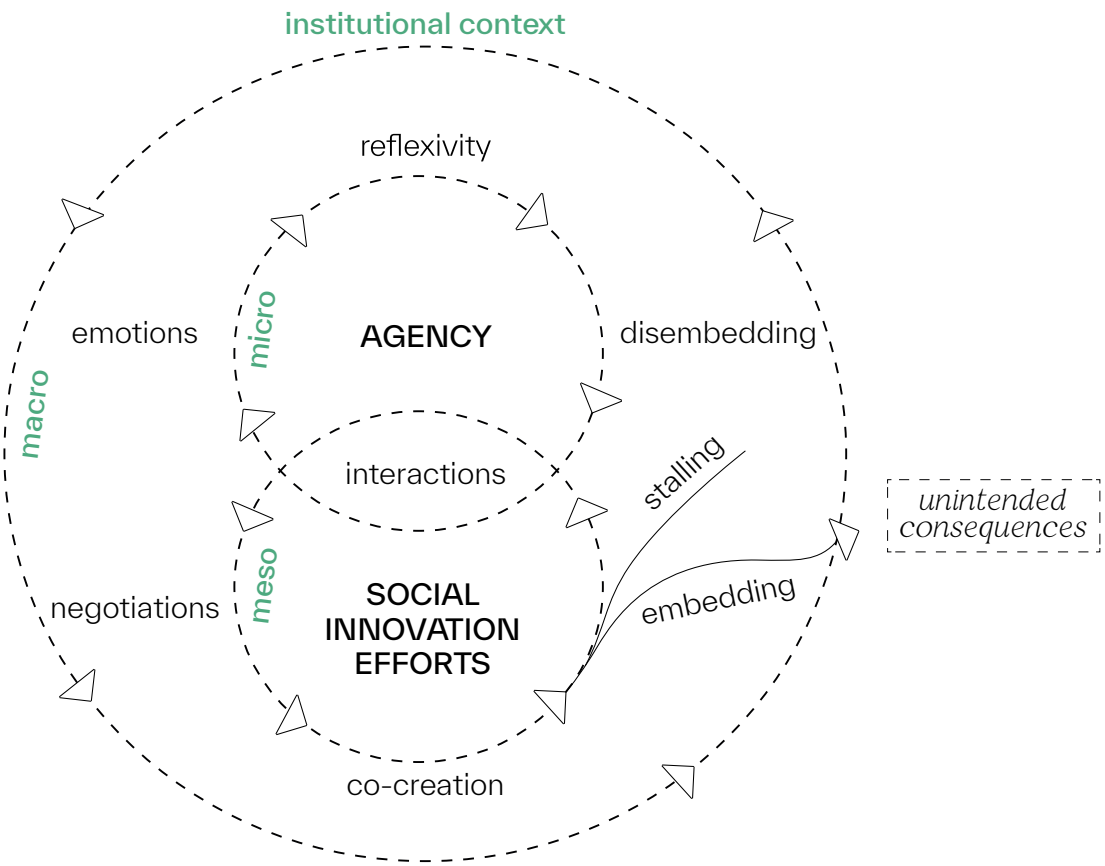
The emergence of creative communities within the context of social innovation further complicates the complex interdependencies among various systems and actors, requiring the renegotiation of existing institutions or the creation of new ones. To understand the relational dynamics of social innovation efforts, Van Wijk et al. (2019) outlined a three-cycle model (Figure 5.15), which operates at the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis and emphasises the institutional nature of social innovation processes. While most studies on social innovation focus on the micro level of individual social innovators, this framework argues for an institutional theory-based understanding

↓ **Figure 5.17** Three-cycle model of social innovation (Van Wijk et al., 2019, p. 891).

of social innovation, considering social orders, social roles, and interactions among multiple actors. It outlines the ways in which the three cycles interconnect, recognising different dynamics for each level of analysis. The micro level focuses on individual actors and their interactions, which trigger emotions, reflexivity, and innovative thinking. The meso level involves diverse actors negotiating shared perspectives and co-creating alternative institutions. This cycle builds upon the first, as emotions, reflexivity, and disembedding serve as the foundation for interactions, negotiations, co-creation, and embedding, ultimately fostering innovation. Finally, the macro level considers the influence of the broader institutional context, which can either impede or support social innovation efforts. However, social innovation initiatives have the potential to redefine the macro-context, bringing about profound social change.

As mentioned, the first cycle of the model focuses on the micro level of analysis, considering the action of individual social innovators, referred to as 'embedded individuals' throughout the study. To understand how they become more empowered and engage in social innovation, the model proposes to examine their patterns of interaction and emotional involvement. Reflexivity plays a key role in this process as actors develop an awareness of the social structures that shape their behaviour and envision alternative ways of solving problems. Emotions and emotional connections between individuals also play a crucial role in driving engagement and commitment to social innovation activities. Specifically, positive social emotions, such as respect and trust, generate openness and reflexivity when people interact on moral causes they deeply care about. These shared emotions help individuals depart, or rather 'disembed', from their usual mindsets and become deeply involved in shared projects.

The meso cycle of social innovation involves interactive spaces where actors negotiate, co-create, and embed social innovations. These spaces facilitate face-to-face encounters, promote debate,



and allow for the development of new arrangements. They provide a platform for negotiation and co-creation, enabling actors to challenge institutional constraints and explore alternative approaches. Embedding dynamics are also required to produce long-term impact within the institutional context, engaging multiple actors to increase the likelihood of success. A significant role in this regard is played by social movements and creative communities, whose efforts aim to deinstitutionalise existing norms and establish new frames. However, embedding social innovations requires a top-down vision besides such bottom-up experimentation. Both institutions and businesses have in fact recognised the importance of user involvement in shaping and institutionalising innovations.

The macro cycle of social innovation refers to the broader societal institutions that guide and impact the dynamics of social innovation processes on the micro and meso cycles. This level includes institutions such as democracy, capitalism, social class, poverty, and exclusion, as well as the set of organisations that interact with one another in a specific area of institutional life. The institutional context can either encourage or repress actors' emotions, will to engage, and reflexivity, meaning that social innovations need to align with certain characteristics of the institutional context in which they take place. These characteristics, such as multiplicity of competing logic or degree of institutionalisation, are defined by Van Wijk et al. (2019) as 'field conditions' and play a significant role in determining the likelihood of success of social innovation. Low multiplicity and high institutionalisation limit opportunities for innovation, while the opposite creates unpredictability; as a consequence, only moderate levels of both conditions provide fertile ground for social innovation. However, the authors suggest that opportunities for social innovation could arise from the actions of 'social disruptors', besides those of social innovators. These include interrupting, disrupting, or undermining established routines that are typically unquestioned. While they may not have socially oriented goals, their actions can create dissonance, potentially leading to the emergence of an institutional space that encourages reflexivity, co-creation, and negotiation processes seen in social innovation cycles. Based on the provided definition, call-out actors such as Diet Prada could potentially be considered as 'social disruptors' rather than 'social innovators'. As mentioned in chapter 4.3.4, Diet Prada's mission is to challenge established norms exposing instances of plagiarism and cultural appropriation in the fashion industry. Although their actions may not provide socially oriented solutions expected of social innovators, their disruptive efforts can create dissonance, paving the way for social innovation to occur. On the contrary, the Fashion Revolution movement is an example of a social innovator who managed to introduce new ideas and processes resulting in positive change. As such, the movement encouraged greater transparency and accountability from fashion brands, and advocated for systemic change in the industry, focusing on issues such as better working conditions and reduced environmental impact. Overall,

"institutional theory provides us with a lens to understand social innovation processes that emphasizes its multilevel and complex nature. Dynamics at all levels may be aligned. We can find actors, emotionally driven and reflexive, to engage in social innovation at the micro level, who inhabit interactive spaces supportive of their efforts and find themselves in fields with degrees of complexity and institutionalization that allow them to define, gain support, and advance their well-intended goals" (Van Wijk et al., 2019, p. 902).

Conceptualising social innovation processes as the product of agentic, relational, and situated dynamics, the author highlights

the multilevel nature of social innovation, moving away from the overly simplistic understandings of social innovation that have been prevalent in the literature. Because of the complexity of social problems, new organisational forms that include diverse actors may be necessary to interrupt existing modes of action and generate new alternatives. This perspective is not intended to add further complexity, but rather to acknowledge the institutional conditions that underpin broad societal challenges. As such, the framework provides an overview of the triggers of social innovation efforts and explains how they can be sustained over time: effective social innovation requires an enabling environment that fosters collaboration while also addressing power dynamics in all cycles and sectors. Supportive policies are crucial to ensure the effectiveness of social innovations in driving meaningful change in society. Consequently, the development and diffusion of new technologies and products necessitate a supportive institutional environment, including government incentives and positive user acceptance.

Social innovation faces the additional challenge of needing to transform the very institutions responsible for the issue it aims to address. To better understand the mechanisms and effects of this challenge, Purtik and Arenas (2019) analysed how innovating actors shape societal norms and behaviours throughout the innovation process. As Van Wijk et al. (2019), they indicate the intersection of institutional theory and social innovation as an insightful area of research to suggest that social innovators can influence the institutional environment rather than simply adapting to it. It is fundamental to note that this environment does not only consist of formal institutions such as laws and regulations, but also of informal ones such as norms, values, and beliefs. The authors (Purtik & Arenas, 2019) argue that social innovation can only reach its full potential when aligned with societal values and when reinforced by established habits and everyday behaviours. Focusing on how innovating actors influence societal norms, they aim to understand the process of embedding social innovation to make it more accepted and impactful. When innovations are introduced, these are socially constructed through the efforts of both producers and intermediaries: building a new market not only requires the acceptance of new norms and meanings but also their integration into daily practices to reinforce such values. While much research with this aim focuses on formal institutions, little is known about how innovating actors shape informal institutions. The findings of the study (Purtik & Arenas, 2019) reveal that the process of shaping societal norms throughout the innovation process is carried out through different practices, classified as unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral depending on the number of actors involved. Unilateral processes involve the activities in which companies act alone to bring about change, such as challenging prevailing fears among potential users. Bilateral processes consist of the direct interactions between innovating actors and users, where users are not mere consumers but participate in shaping the innovation process. An example of this is represented by codesign processes to ensure that user needs are met. In multilateral processes, firms engage with a range of stakeholders and policymakers to shape societal norms and expectations. Collectively, the results emphasise the importance of direct and indirect interactions between social innovators and users, together with the role of physical experiences and positive emotions. User participation and feedback, and cooperation between companies and public actors are also seen as beneficial, as they generate trust among users. The identification of these three types of change processes is crucial for social innovators to include informal institutions in

decision-making practices. Creating an organisational structure that encourages interaction with users and other stakeholders can be beneficial in this regard.

Together, the studies discussed so far outline a critical role in creating an enabling environment to achieve sustainable social innovation. Because social innovation efforts are influenced by broader institutional contexts, these institutional conditions can either assist or delay the ability of social innovation to diffuse in an impactful way. However, the activities proposed by creative communities and other actors still show high levels of disorganisation, experiencing problems in diffusing and scaling up. This is where the topic of 'infrastructuring' - widely acknowledged in the literature on design for social innovation (Fassi et al., 2013; Manzini, 2014, 2015; Meroni et al., 2016; Selloni, 2017) - comes into place, offering a design approach as a possible solution to these issues.

5.3 Design for Social Innovation

5.3.1 The Role of Design in a Connected World

Despite the potential for social innovation to bring about significant positive change in society, it necessitates the development of a new cultural and practical framework, which, as suggested, can be embodied by design. To this end, design itself must undergo a comprehensive transformation to become a pervasive force across modern interconnected socio-technical networks. In his introduction to the book 'Design, When Everybody Designs', design academic Manzini (2015, p. 1) writes:

"This book talks about design and social change in a connected world in transition toward sustainability: a world in which everybody constantly has to design and redesign their existence, whether they wish to or not; a world in which many of these projects converge and give rise to wider social changes; a world in which the role of design experts is to feed and support these individual and collective projects—and thus the social changes they may give rise to".

As evident from this statement, today's world is characterized by high levels of connectivity, facilitated by advancements in transportation and communication systems, leading to the erosion of traditional social conventions and cultural norms and making organisations more open to transformation. The digital revolution and the widespread use of the Internet have accelerated this dissolution, revealing what Manzini (2015, p. 33) defines as a "connected world" with a "turbulent, almost fluid nature". It is this dynamic context that urges contemporary societies to evolve towards sustainability and resilience.

Against this background, the importance of the design approach in social innovation has been widely recognised in literature. Among others, Mulgan (2014) highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of applying design to social innovation. The strengths include understanding user experiences, ideation and tools for creativity, rapid prototyping, visualisation of problems and effective solutions, and systemic thinking. On the other hand, there are also drawbacks such as high costs, difficulties in demonstrating impact, limited economic understanding, lack of implementation skills, and resistance to learning. However, a contrasting perspective from Selloni (2017) suggests that there has been significant progress in the field of design for social innovation, with a global movement dedicated to developing socially innovative solutions through design.

Indeed, the 21st century has witnessed a close intertwining of social innovation and design, with one serving as both a catalyst and an objective for the other. The potential for design to play a significant role in driving and supporting social change has led to the emergence of the field of 'design for social innovation'. While this approach requires a better understanding of the potential, limitations, and consequences of applying design to social innovation, it is not to be intended as a separate discipline but rather a way in which design manifests. As such, it represents a different use of contemporary design which expands the traditional point of view on the discipline and has the purpose to

make social innovation more established, effective, and durable (Manzini, 2015; Selloni, 2017). According to a first definition proposed by Manzini (2014, p. 65), design for social innovation refers in fact to "a constellation of design initiatives geared toward making social innovation more probable, effective, long-lasting, and apt to spread". In this sense, design initiatives are interpreted as purposeful actions guided by design principles and techniques to initiate, enhance, and replicate social innovation. To this end, design for social innovation necessitates a new culture and perspective, rather than a specific set of skills and methods. It involves an iterative codesign process where each design activity contributes to a broader research program, generating transferable design knowledge. A posterior explanation of the concept by the same author (Manzini, 2015, p. 62) intends design for social innovation as "everything that expert design can do to activate, sustain, and orient processes of social change toward sustainability". By the above definition, design for social innovation is a diverse field resulting from the fusion of social innovation and contemporary expert design. It includes a wide spectrum of activities that all share a common goal: contributing to the social dialogue on how to address and achieve common objectives. This conversation involves various social actors pursuing innovative approaches and challenging conventional methods. Essentially, this social conversation represents a form of codesign, where participants share their unique knowledge and design abilities.

Supporting this perspective, in her book "CoDesign for Public-Interest Services", Selloni (2017) discusses the various functions design might assume to the growing pressure imposed by societal challenges and transformation. In particular, codesign is addressed as a process which can support citizens in tackling issues in a more innovative and collaborative way, contributing to the regeneration of democratic practices. This reflection stems from the observation of the phenomenon of creative communities, which she also addresses in terms of 'active citizenship' or simply 'social innovators'. The role of these groups of individuals represents a form of collaborative activism which contributes to the development of non-traditional systems of services. This kind of citizen involvement appears multi-dimensional, bringing about new forms of participation in the public interest, ranging from classic forms of activism to real participation in governance activities and effective active citizenship (Selloni, 2017). The participation of various actors at different stages of the innovation process leads to a dynamic and unpredictable design practice, which aligns closely with the concept of participatory design. According to Selloni (2017), both design for social innovation and participatory design use methodologies aimed at negotiating common ground among stakeholders through active participation and collaborative design activities. More precisely, Manzini (2014) mentions that the two approaches share the following characteristics:

→ **1. Highly dynamic processes**: design for social innovation and participatory design both extend beyond traditional approaches to become complex, interconnected, and occasionally contradictory processes.

→ **2. Creative and proactive activities**: designers serve as mediators and facilitators, using their creativity and design knowledge to drive initiatives.

→ **3. Complex co-design activities**: both approaches require the use of prototypes, mock-ups, design games, models, sketches, and other artefacts specifically designed to promote, sustain, and guide the co-design process.

As social innovations evolve, successful ones gradually transform from social inventions into structured prototypes and social enterprises. In terms of the design role, experts must use their skills and competencies to identify and support promising social innovation cases. To this end, other disciplines such as service design and strategic design gain relevance, as the former focuses on improving the quality of interactions, while the latter facilitates the creation of innovative partnerships (Manzini, 2015; Selloni, 2017). Platforms, services, and codesign tools are also crucial to enhance the accessibility, effectiveness, and replicability of individual interventions. This support creates a scaling-out effect by fostering horizontal synergies that enable successful solutions to be replicated across diverse contexts (Manzini, 2015). In other words, design can play a role in supporting existing practices through the creation of a dedicated infrastructure. The process of 'infrastructuring' results in three main benefits: avoiding the potential failure of citizen initiatives, developing efficient and sustainable solutions, and enabling an intersection between top-down institutional services and bottom-up individual actions (Selloni, 2017). When examining projects through the lens of design for social innovation, a few common attributes emerge: these projects aim to bring about lasting changes on a regional level, they prioritise citizen engagement as a means to achieve their defined goals and are initiated and guided by design agencies, design schools, or research groups. Moreover, they are often large-scale innovation processes resulting from a series of small-scale initiatives, with local projects being coordinated and amplified by larger framework projects (Manzini, 2014). In terms of design role, this process is predominantly design-driven, aiming to amplify local initiatives to generate sustainable changes on a broader scale. It is important to note that these design initiatives can take various forms, including top-down, bottom-up, or a hybrid dimension between the two: professional designers can contribute to these processes by either designing with communities, collaborating with various actors to develop shared ideas and solutions, or designing for communities, improving existing collaborative services and making them more accessible and effective. However, they all contribute to a larger participatory process and are part of an ongoing societal dialogue on what actions to undertake and how to implement them effectively.

To demonstrate the crucial role of designers in contemporary times, in his foreword to Selloni's book, Manzini (2017) discusses the political significance of codesign processes. He argues that codesign can "regenerate the ideas and practices of democracy" (Manzini in foreword to Selloni, 2017, p. VIII) by creating shared visions, objectives, practices, and strategies through conversations. This can help build citizenship and create a democratic society where citizens play an active part in design activities. He suggests that a new generation of designers, specifically prepared to deal with such matters, must play an important role in activating and supporting codesigning ideas and tools that lead to interesting results and contribute to regenerating the practice of democracy. In giving reasoning for such statements, he highlights the association between design and democracy as a way to contrast the success of an idea of direct, online democracy, which exposes us to unprecedented risks. Instead, he proposes a new form of indirect democracy, parallel to

"Using the appeal of digital technology and social media this idea proposes a dangerous simplification of reality, reducing choices relating to the public good to a sort of continuous plebiscite (avoiding the effort of creating shared opinions and of mediating between differing opinions)" (Manzini in foreword to Selloni, 2017, p. IX).

representative democracy, where shared ideas and practices are developed through dialogue and effort, affirming that

"it is in their dialogical nature that the guarantee lies of leading to results that are more coherent with the irreducible complexity of the world" (Manzini in foreword to Selloni, 2017, p. IX).

Surely enough, contemporary design covers a multi-faceted yet impactful function. To better understand the variety of roles and diverse dimensions within design for social innovation, a comprehensive mapping of the field of design modes is outlined by Manzini (2015). The chart (Figure 5.16) is based on two key dimensions: 'actors and competence' and 'motivations and expectations'.

The first axis indicates the range of actors and their competence in the design process: it creates a field of possibilities between 'diffuse design', the natural designing capacity potentially found in everyone, and 'expert design', performed by trained design professionals with specialised skills and knowledge. The second axis spans from 'problem solving' to 'sense making', two perspectives according to which design practice can be understood. In the problem-solving view, design is seen as a tool to solve practical challenges and find solutions at various levels. On the other end of the spectrum, sense making places importance on creating meaning and shaping conversations, defining how design can generate new perspectives, understandings, and experiences. These two dimensions of design are autonomous yet interconnected. The combination of these two axes generates four quadrants, each of which depicts a characteristic design mode, capturing the diverse motivations, competencies, and roles within the field of design, and allowing for the recognition of design's potential impact. The four quadrants operate and have evolved as follows:

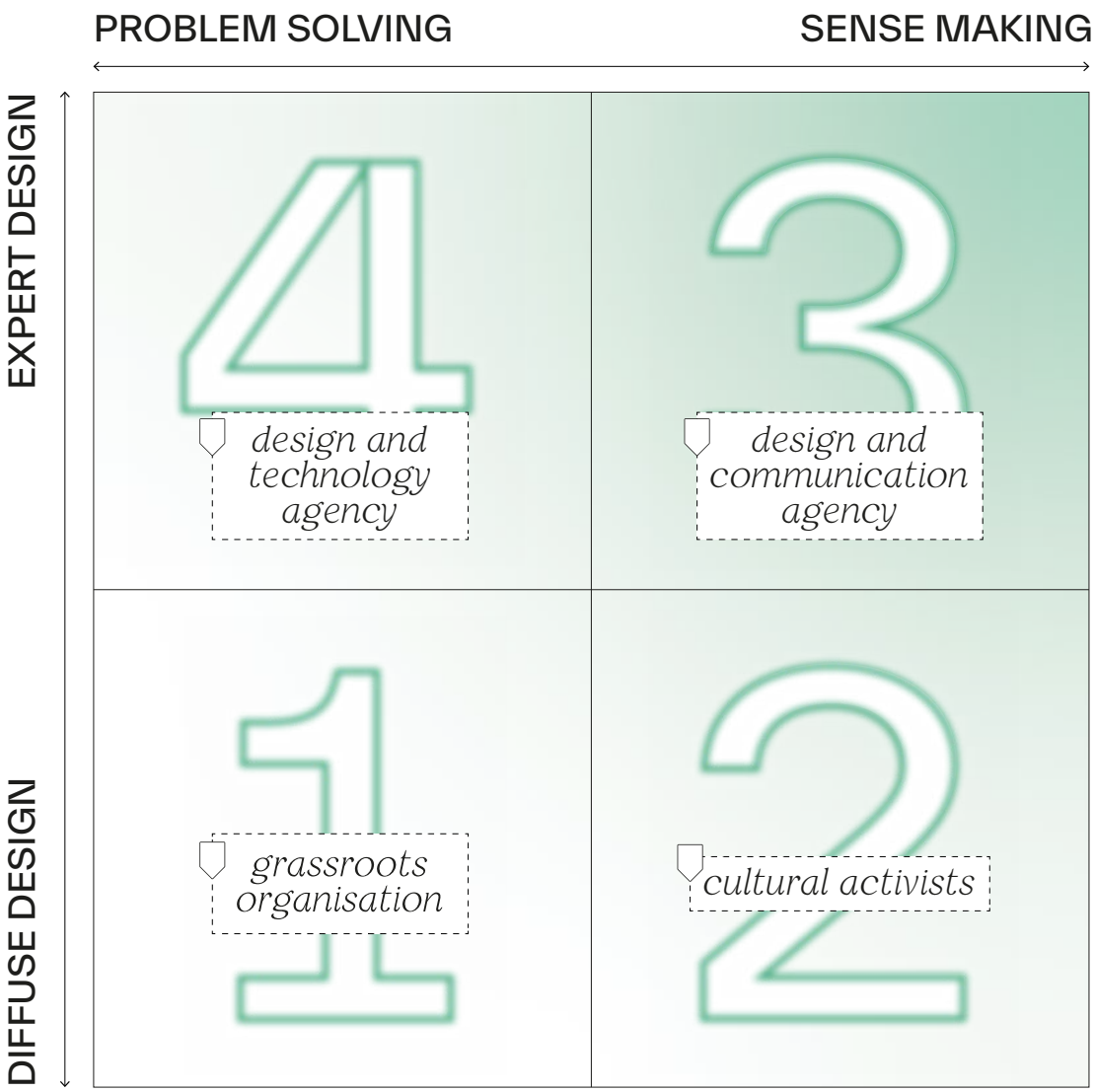
→ **1. Grassroots Organisation (Diffuse Design / Problem Solving Quadrant)**: grassroots organisations, once ideologically based and minority-driven, are now becoming more open and flexible. They are evolving into collaborative organisations that strive to address practical issues through their collective efforts.

→ **2. Cultural activists (diffuse design/sense making quadrant)**: the rise of social media has transformed the role of cultural activists, allowing individuals to express their cultural and artistic interests: a significant portion of modern urban society actively participate in cultural systems, creating and spreading new cultural meanings.

→ **3. Design and communication agency (expert design/ sense making quadrant)**: design and communication agencies are shifting their focus from traditional products and artefacts to comprehensive design processes. They design hybrid and dynamic artefacts that integrate products, services, and communication into a cohesive whole, aiming to create meaningful experiences and interactions.

→ **4. Design and technology agency (expert design/problem solving quadrant)**: design agencies with interdisciplinary teams are faced with the need to address increasingly complex social and environmental problems. They collaborate with various stakeholders and adopt user-centred design and co-designing methodologies to tackle these challenges effectively.

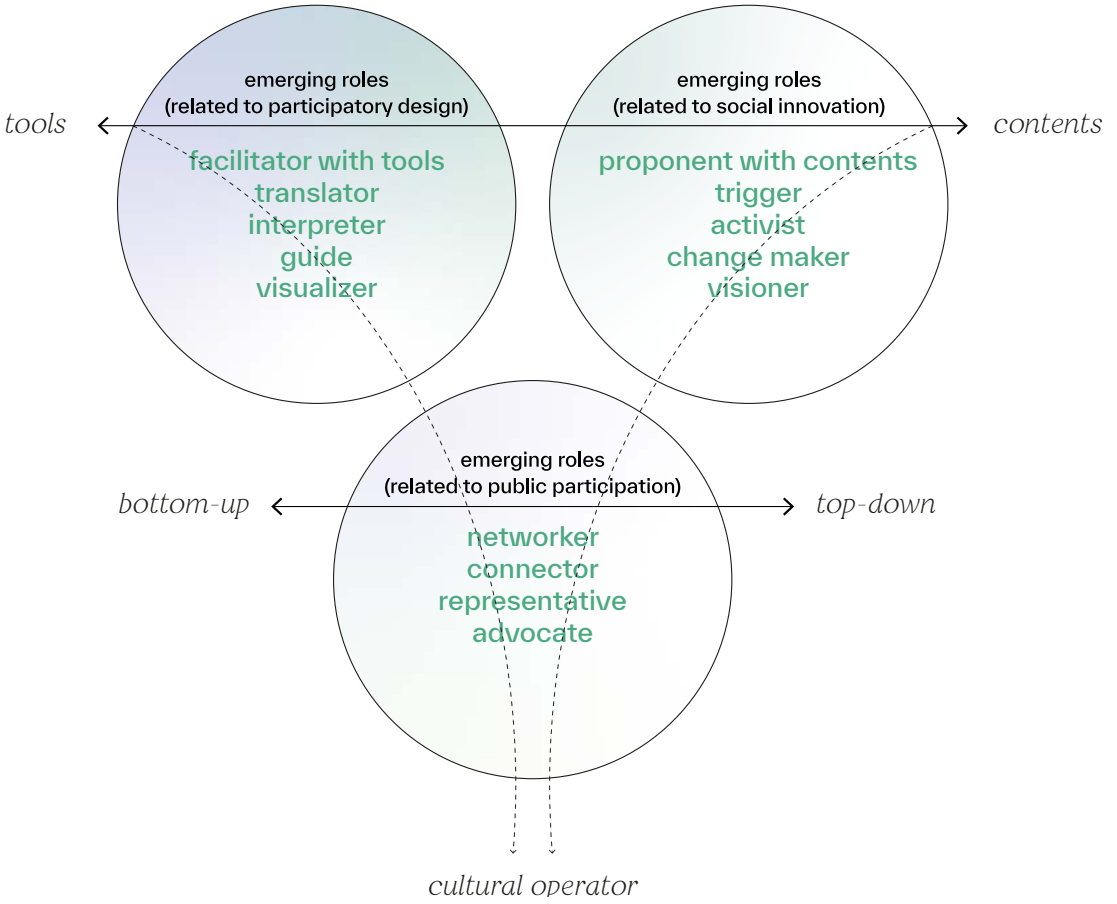
The second quadrant covers one of the most relevant modes for this investigation, referring to cases in which design functions as activism, depicting a convergence of efforts among cultural activists, grassroots organisations, and design activists. Their initiatives aim not only to provide immediate solutions



↑ **Figure 5.18** Design modes map (Manzini, 2015, p. 40).

to problems but also to generate interest in specific areas and challenge conventional perspectives on resolving issues. While the cultural role of social minorities has been recognised for some time, other groups of cultural and design activists are gaining prominence and influence. These activists may work collaboratively in design teams, consisting of both volunteers and expert designers. Even though their primary drive is rooted in cultural motivations (sense-making quadrants), their activities often involve addressing concrete problems that require effective problem-solving capabilities (Manzini, 2015). In this context, design is utilised as a means to provoke thought, instigate change, and demonstrate alternative ways of perceiving and resolving societal issues.

Commenting on the model proposed by Manzini, Selloni (2017) intends that it allows a reconsideration of the conventional role of expert design in a scenario where it coexists with diffused design performed by broader communities. More specifically, design experts are tasked with the responsibility of amplifying promising social innovations by using their skills to design products, services, and communication programs that enhance the visibility and scalability of these initiatives. Elaborating on the distinction between expert and diffuse design, and building upon empirical research and experimentation conducted in codesign contexts with creative communities, Selloni (2017) offers an overview of expert designers' roles (Figure 5.19). She points out that they can be both facilitators, who make co-created ideas more visible, and provokers, who stimulate group discussion and envision solutions.



↑ **Figure 5.19** Overview of expert designer's roles within Selloni's book (2017, p. 170).

This embodies a conceptual shift in designing for the community, and designing with the community, by creating spaces of synergy and partnership for diverse actors. As a consequence, contemporary expert designers also cover the role of connectors: they transform citizen initiatives into public-interest services, bridging bottom-up and top-down dimensions. This affirms the role of the designer as one with great cultural value, typical of "who, in creating new collective visions, suggests a new idea about living and thus, a new culture" (Selloni, 2017, p. 174).

To conclude, it can be emphasised that expert design operates on two levels: it supports social actors in their daily co-designing efforts and collaborates in creating shared images and stories for a new idea of well-being. In essence, it not only assists in practical problem-solving but also contributes to shaping the collective imagination and understanding of a better way of living.

5.3.2 Infrastructuring by Design

In the context of design for social innovation, most scholars stress the importance of an enabling ecosystem, or 'infrastructure' to support collaborative organisations. As widely demonstrated, these comprehend a mix of bottom-up, top-down, and peer-to-peer interactions despite being often associated with grassroots efforts. Consequently, collaborative organisations rely on the existence of a supportive environment which incorporates technical infrastructure and a range of cultural and social structures, such as national institutions and local community associations. According to these premises, the presence of expert designers is fundamental in creating an ecosystem that fosters active, collaborative, and sustainable behaviour. Infrastructures serve as intermediaries to connect various stakeholders and resources, meaning they do not represent a tangible item but rather a relational concept that emerges in practice and is

connected to other elements, including people and activities. Focusing on the social and relational dimensions of infrastructure outlines a connection with the design process, specifically referring to design activities that prioritise flexibility, open design processes, and long-term perspectives. The forms of mediation adopted within these dynamics are interpreted in literature (Fassi et al., 2013; Manzini, 2015; Selloni, 2017) as enabling platforms, and have the purpose to sustain innovative initiatives until a unique prototype is developed. This prototype serves as a catalyst and is meant to empower and enable the social innovators to take charge of the initiative independently, distinguishing it as a special aspect of the design approach (Fassi et al., 2013). On this matter, one criticism among design researchers regards potential 'social whitewashing', i.e. the instrumentalisation of designers' work by local governments for propaganda and institutional communication purposes. Selloni (2017) addresses this concern stating that, while this could be seen as problematic, it also presents an opportunity to establish a neutral territory where individual and collective interests can converge. Acting at this interface would signify rediscovering lost relationships and enabling meaningful political actions.

The creation of an ecosystem that encourages active and participative behaviour involves various design interventions, with the ultimate aim of establishing a complex infrastructure able to support connected and autonomous initiatives. The process of infrastructuring includes elements such as digital platforms for connectivity and self-organisation, physical spaces for participants to meet and collaborate, logistic services to support the mobility of both people and resources, information services for guidance and sharing experiences, assessment services that monitor activities and measure results, communication and promotion services, design expert services to develop and systemise these artefacts. Therefore, the infrastructure in the context of collaborative practices involves both non-human elements and human actors. The former consists of various resources such as spaces, competences, information, language, tools, roles, and rules, while the latter includes active citizens, stakeholders, representatives of institutions, and different types of experts.

Design for social innovation operates through iterative processes that involve multiple design strategies and initiatives, each with its own modes, timelines, and outcomes. One approach is through mapping and visualisations, making information more visible and accessible through maps and infographic systems which increase understanding of complex systems. Another method is weak signal amplification, highlighting lesser-known cases and their outcomes to foster broader conversations on socially recognised values. Storytelling is another powerful tool for addressing challenging topics and bridging the gap between the present and desired future: digital storytelling, in particular, can be employed to reconstruct local identities, create hybrid realities, and engage people in envisioning possibilities. Scenario building and design-oriented scenarios enable exploring different future trajectories and their implications. These design strategies play a role in shaping collaborative organisations and facilitating social innovation. Moreover, design experts use a range of 'visual tools for social conversation' (Manzini, 2015, p. 133) to make their proposals and discussions more tangible and visible. These design tools serve as artefacts specifically created to stimulate, support, and summarise social conversations. They can be broadly classified into three categories: conversation subjects, conversation prompts, and experience enablers. Conversation subjects initiate discussions and provoke reactions, aiming to stimulate interactions between several parties. They can take various forms, such as provocative actions in the real world through

design activism or innovative uses of traditional communication channels like exhibitions, movies, and books to envision possible future scenarios. Conversation prompts facilitate communication at different stages of the co-design process. They include visualisation tools to illustrate the current state of activities and possible alternatives. Finally, experience enablers include prototypes and pilot projects that spark interaction and bring ideas to life. These design tools play a crucial role in fostering meaningful discussions and bringing ideas to life in a collaborative manner, by enabling participants to explore possibilities, ultimately enacting social innovation.

According to Selloni (2017), the process of infrastructuring can be divided into ten key steps: meeting a community, selecting service topics, identifying local stakeholders, identifying a symbolic place, developing a program, codesigning, prototyping, co-producing, co-managing, and implementing. This process serves as an ideal framework for social innovation, emphasising the crucial role of citizen participation. Another significant attempt at defining a model has been conducted by the Polimi DESIS Lab (Fassi et al., 2013; Meroni et al., 2016), who defined the 'Social Innovation Journey', consisting of thirteen stages.

5.3.3 Social Innovation Journey

The 'Social Innovation Journey' is an action format developed by the Polimi DESIS Lab (Fassi et al., 2013; Meroni et al., 2016), the Italian research group of DESIS Network - Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability - based in the Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano. The laboratory, which adopts "a strategic and systemic approach to design, with a specific focus on design for services and design activism" (POLIMI DESIS Lab – Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability, n.d.), presented the framework as a guide for designers to engage communities in prototyping social innovations. Together with 'The Social Innovation Toolbox', 'The Social Innovation Journey' represents the main outcome of the TRANSITION project - Transnational Network for Social Innovation Incubation, and was inspired by the Social Innovation Spiral by the Young Foundation (Murray et al., 2010). The journey indicates a non-linear sequence of steps and actions, encouraging co-design and experimentation of new services and solutions. This approach reflects a shift

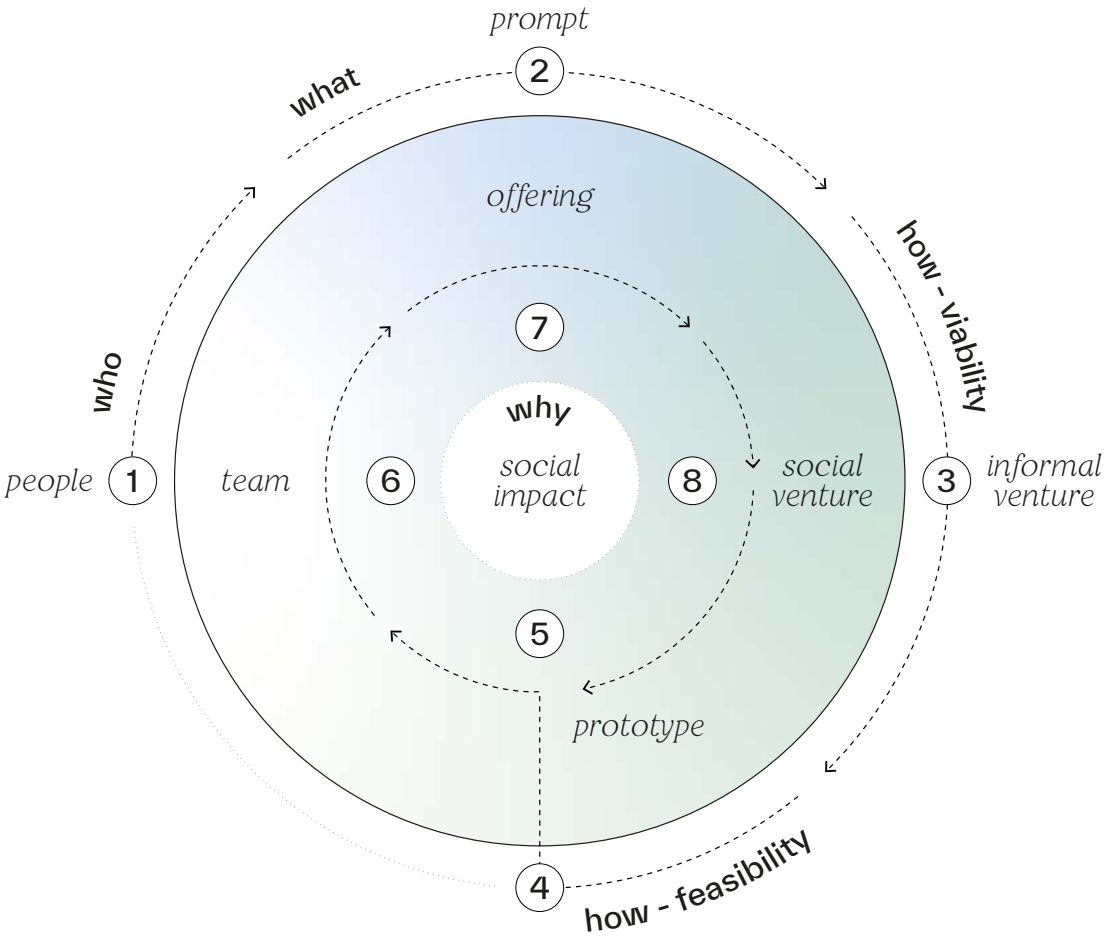
"from designing 'for' the community, to designing 'with' the community and finally to allow communities to design 'by themselves'" (Fassi et al., 2013, p. 5)

with the final purpose of creating the conditions for the innovators to be autonomous in driving the innovation process further. Fassi et al. state that

"this is a 'designerly' way of intervening into people's lives, motivating actions, mobilising stakeholders, creating 'spaces of contest', which reveal and challenge existing configurations and conditions of society" (Fassi et al., 2013, p. 5).

By formalising recurring activities in research projects, the framework offers a design-oriented approach to understanding the different stages and potential of social innovations and guiding their development through appropriate actions.

As mentioned, the model (Figure 5.20) focuses on the sequence of steps that social innovators go through to develop the skills to achieve growth and positive influence on society (Meroni et al., 2016). The Journey starts from the outside and moves inward, representing the social impact created by the innovators. The framework consists of two main circles of incubation: the external circle for early-stage social innovations, supporting them in idea



↑ **Figure 5.20** Social Innovation Journey (Meroni et al., 2016, p. 3).

generation, structured proposals, and prototype testing; the internal circle for more mature and defined innovations, helping in formalising and replicating solutions. However, the non-linearity of the process allows for movements and reiterations along the path. Within the circles, the activities are organised into five main areas:

→ **who (stages 1 and 6)**: forming teams and engaging stakeholders;

→ **what (stages 2 and 7)**: transforming visions into ideas and proposals;

→ **how (stages 3 and 8)**: assessing viability and developing a sustainable financial plan;

→ **how (stages 5 and 6)**: testing operational models and generating a prototype;

→ **why (centre of the circle)**: social impact as the ultimate goal.

The Social Innovation Journey considers the flexibility of the social innovation process, providing multiple entry and exit points, according to the grade of maturity of the innovation. Since each step of the journey involves specific tools and competences to support progress, the outcome of the TRANSITION project included a 'Social Innovation Journey Toolbox' to assist social innovators at each stage of the process. The toolbox is organised into the five main areas of the Journey: who, what, how - viability, how - feasibility, and why - social impact.

Among these, the 'Social Innovation Scanner' and the 'Responsible Innovation Grid' appear as valuable frameworks for social impact assessment. The Social Innovation Scanner

(Figure 5.21) is a self-assessment tool that helps social innovators evaluate the expected social impact of their solution. It focuses on seven qualities that can be positively impacted by adopting a wide social perspective. The tool provides questions and examples to guide reflection on the solution's impact in each area. It can be used to design new solutions, transform existing ventures, or assess the social impact at different stages of development. The tool is meant to highlight the orientation of the solution towards social innovation qualities and can be used both in the early stages and later stages of the innovation process (Meroni et al., 2016).

The second model, the Responsible Innovation Grid (Figure 5.22), is an analytical tool to assess the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of an innovation project. It helps translate sustainable development objectives into the project and identifies areas for potential progress. The grid contains 24 criteria and is most suitable for the later stages of the project when assessing effective impact (Meroni et al., 2016).

These frameworks delineate the main topic of the next section of the research. Throughout this section, the importance of a design approach towards social innovation has been demonstrated. Through codesign processes, designers can actively engage citizens and stakeholders, contributing to the regeneration of democratic practices. As expert designers tackle a wide range of issues, from practical problem-solving to sense-making, the evolving landscape of design for social innovation highlights the potential for them to become catalysts for systemic change. However, this context requires the development of measurement and evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of social innovation initiatives. Recognising that current challenges can not be addressed with traditional approaches motivates an inclination towards a more holistic approach. To promote this, new mindsets, methods, and strategies should be implemented, including transparency about impact and standardisation of measurements (Wolkowinski, 2016).

→ **Figure 5.21** Social Innovation Scanner (Meroni et al., 2016, p. 27).

1. CAPACITY

Does the innovation build competence and capacity across society?
pro-activity, self-organization, capacity to act.

2. WELLNESS

Does the innovation contribute in creating wellness and collaborative contexts for the whole sosciety?
self- determination and recognition of common rules, intrinsic motivation, meaningfulness of experiences, trust, mutual support, sense of safety and securuty.

3. PARTICIPATION

Does the innovation increase participation and sense of belonging?
democratization of processes, transparency of decisions, strategic perspective.

4. ASSETS: SPACES, GOODS, SERVICES

Does the innovation increase the variery of spaces, goods and services available for fullfilling the diversity of everyday lives?
responsability taking by the community, collective ownership, self management, liveability, flexibility of places, evolution of functions.

5. IDENTITY AND INCLUSION

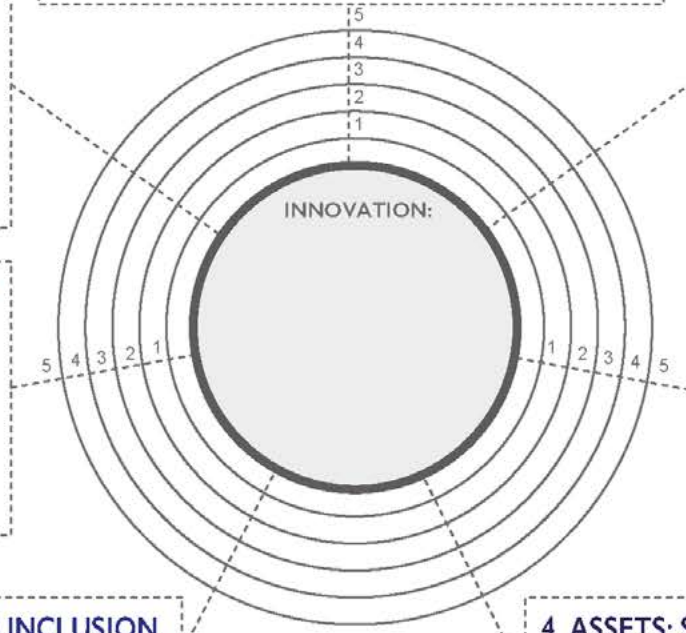
Does the innovation strengthen the sense of social and cultural identity, fostering inclusion?
self recognition in the diversity, cultural diversity and vivacity, sharing of aims despite the differences, social and cultural inclusion

6. ENVIRONMENT

Does the innovation foster a fair distribution of social, economic and environmental resources?
decrease of inequalities; fairness of the contexts; reduction and intensification of the use of resources; infrasctructures nudging virtuous and sustainable behaviours.

7. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Is the innovation viable and financially sustainable?
local entrepreneurship, job creation, involvement of young people and marginalised or fragile people



Characterization of the innovation project

	Status			Reliability			Comments
	To undertake	In progress	Undertaken	High uncertainty	Moderate uncertainty	Low uncertainty	
Marketing feasibility (needs, competition, marketing, added-value, positioning...)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Technical feasibility (research, prototype, pilot, experimentation)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Financial feasibility (budget, financing plan, estimated profitability, subsidies)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Organizational feasibility (project manager, team adapted to the project, external collaboration)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Legal feasibility (regulation, intellectual/industrial property)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Distrubution/ Commercialisation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Coherence Project/Company

	Yes	No	Comments
Project in the core-business or in the market of the company. Consistent with the company's vision	☐	☐	
Project's size adapted to company's size	☐	☐	
Sufficient financial resources of the company with regards to the project	☐	☐	

Expressed needs and expectations

Technology (advice orientation, search...)	☐	Team / HR / internal organisation	☐
Offer / Value proposal / Economic model	☐	Search of strategic partners	☐
Competition / Market	☐	Legal (orientation)	☐
Sustainable development	☐	Project engineering	☐
Industrial / Intellectual property strategy	☐	Financing	☐
Europe / International	☐	Biomimicry (training, advice, diagnostic)	☐
Other needs (to be detailed):			
Detailed needs / Comments:			

↑ **Figure 5.22**
Responsible Innovation Grid (Meroni et al., 2016, p. 31).

Responsible Innovation analysis

Assessment criteria (*) The level of consideration of a criteria is defined as the evaluation of the type and relevancy of the set of actions started in order to: . Assess, limit the negative effects or enhance the positive effects of the innovation . Strengthen the success of the innovation by anticipating in the short, mid and long term.		Level of the consideration of the criteria (*)						
		Little / Not at all	Insufficient	Not relevant / Divided opinion	Well	Very well	This project presents a high value with regards to the criteria	Not addressed
Project approach	Management of stakeholders	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Prospective / Network / Anticipation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Risk management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Responsible value chain	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Ethics and transparency of the offer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Responsible design of the product	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Corporate social responsibility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Environmental impacts	Water management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Materials management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Energy management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Pollution (water, air, soil)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Greenhouse gas effect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Biodiversity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Waste management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social impacts	Health	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Safety	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Quality of life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Solidarity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Common good	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Economic impacts	Product's life cycle cost	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Economic sustainability	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Value creation and sharing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Business model	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Macro-economic impact	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Vocation of the project

Generally according to you, does the project allow to answer to?	Totally disagree	Disagree	Divided opinion	Agree	Totally agree	Comments
A major environmental need	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
A major societal need	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Additional analysis:

. Overall view on the innovation project (Strong points, improvement axis, recommendations)
. Orientations (Contacts / Connections / Useful information…)

5.4 Social Impact Measurement

As previously anticipated, to tackle contemporary challenges and promote a holistic approach to social innovation, it becomes crucial to establish effective measurements and evaluation tools. This section recalls the distinctive characteristics of social innovation and discusses why conventional assessment methods are inadequate for this specific field. Social innovation stands out from innovation in other fields due to its unique outcomes and relationships: it brings about new forms of cooperation and collaboration, making it distinct from commercial or technological innovation. For this reason, traditional processes, metrics, models and methods commonly employed in these fields can not be directly applied to the social economy, posing challenges to measuring success. The latter has been highly debated, and the field has witnessed innovation in metrics, ranging from project impact assessment to broader analyses of social change processes involving a variety of actors in the emergence of social innovations.

Organisational impact happens at different levels, including social, environmental, and economic, and can be both intended and unintended. While intended effects are generally accounted for in corporate performance measurement and decision-making processes, unintended effects are traditionally overlooked, as they are often related to negative social and environmental impacts. As activist actions and media exposure increased accountability demands from stakeholders, a wider number of organisations started addressing the social and environmental consequences of their actions. However, despite the recognised importance of impact measurement, there is still uncertainty in defining how companies' impact on society can be evaluated. One reason for this is related to limitations in performance measurement practices, which generally focus on financial assessment, ignoring environmental and social impacts as they lack a market value (Maas, 2009). Hence, while economic impact reports on an organisational level are easily conducted, the impact of companies on society has yet to be standardised and remains virtually unexplored in literature.

To date, far too little attention has been paid to measuring the impact of CSR on different dimensions, as most practices have been studied in terms of corporate performance based on financial profit, leaving a gap in the examination of their broader societal consequences. Extensive research has been conducted on outputs rather than impact, exploring the micro level of organisations and failing to address the macro level of society. To bridge this knowledge gap, a shift from "output thinking" - related to a company perspective - to "impact thinking" - referred to a societal perspective - is required to assess the added value of brands across the environmental, social, and economic sphere (Maas, 2009). This shift, essential to evaluate an organisation's impact comprehensively, is framed in the following graph (Figure 5.23), illustrating the developments over time in performance measurement's focus.

As mentioned, whereas financial impact assessment has been a continuing concern in business literature, social impact

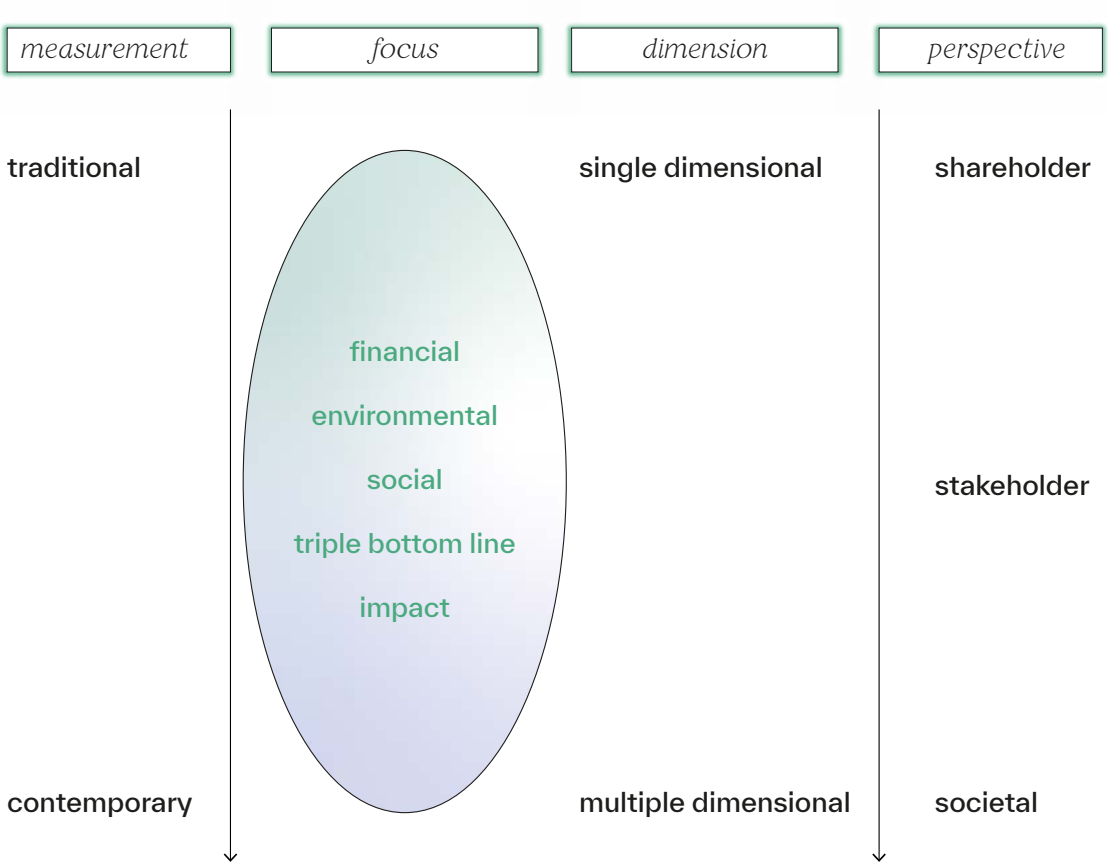
measurement has not reached a degree of standardisation yet. Hence, social and environmental impacts are often addressed as external factors and excluded from formal evaluation. In decision-making processes, managers often overlook the utility of data concerning social impact measurement, especially when they lack immediate market value. As suggested by Maas (2009, p. 63),

"New strategies and competitive realities demand for new measurement systems. [...] One step forward is to look beyond our traditional financial, monetary and quantifiable measures of impacts of activities, and start to explore and incorporate methodologies borrowed from other disciplines, such as sociology. [...] The integration of social impact into the processes of decision making, planning and problem solving requires an innovative and interdisciplinary approach".

Organisations need to have a clear understanding of their objectives, intentions, and values in order to select appropriate impact measures that align with their desired outcomes. Social impact evaluation should be a collective effort, integrating stakeholder, consumer and societal perspectives, moving beyond a company-centric viewpoint, as depicted in Figure 5.23. To this end, the strategy of value integration is effective in revealing traditionally overlooked organisational activities by involving stakeholders in creating values. Getting direct input from stakeholders can compensate for the degree of ambiguity and uncertainty to which the assessment of social impact is naturally subject.

Traditionally, the understanding of value creation was confined to either the economic dimension, in the case of for-profit companies, or the social one, for non-profit organisations. In particular,

"for non-profit organisations it was already more or less commonly accepted that, in order to survive, they have to provide economic and non-economic benefit to the communities they serve" (Maas, 2009, p. 45).



↓ **Figure 5.23** Evolution of the emphasis in performance assessment over time (Maas, 2009, p. 33).

It was only in recent times that conventional corporate environments started incorporating social and ecological performance as a strategic approach to augment the overall value of their businesses. In this context, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model emerged as a business management framework focused on value creation across the three main areas of environment, society and economic sustainability. It was first introduced by business writer John Elkington (1998) to challenge the traditional business system, typically focused on financial accounting, to introduce a comprehensive approach able to assess impact and success on a wider scale.

Elaborating on this concept, Maas (2009) affirms that the challenge for contemporary organisations is to effectively manage performance on all dimensions rather than prioritising a single one, and emphasise the critical role of impact measurement to optimise value creation within a multi-dimensional perspective. Despite this, while standardised measurement and reporting guidelines guarantee clarity in the assessment of companies' financial efficiency, scholars have faced several obstacles in theorising social impact evaluation. According to Maas (2009), the four main factors contributing to the lack of systematic study are the following:

→ social impacts are often difficult to measure and quantify;

→ the social impact of a company, whether positive or negative, is wide-ranging in perspective - social, environmental, economic - as well as regarding short-term or long-term prospects;

→ the causality between the activities promoted by an enterprise and their effects is not direct, given the presence of multiple influencing factors beyond the organisation's activities and the time lag between activities and impact;

→ besides this, unintended or unanticipated social impacts can also be complicated to identify.

→ no universally accepted definition of 'social impact' is present in academic literature.

These complexities emphasise the need for systematic approaches in assessing social impact. To further explore this, the following paragraph delves into the Theory of Change and Impact Value Chain Models, which represent valuable frameworks for understanding and assessing the multifaceted nature of social innovation initiatives.

5.4.1 Social Impact Assessment Tools: Theory of Change and Impact Value Chain

In the context of this discussion, and to address one of the challenging aspects of social impact assessment literature identified by Maas (2009), it is necessary to clarify some key terms. In particular, the definition of 'social impact' aligns with the interpretation provided by Clark et al. (2004), who differentiate between 'outputs', 'outcomes' - related to the provider of the product, activity, or service - and 'impacts' - associated with users and stakeholders. Specifically, by 'impact' Clark et al. (2004, p. 10) refer to "the portion of the total outcome that happened as a result of the activity of the venture, above and beyond what would have happened anyway". In essence, it represents what a company or organisation aims to achieve to make a tangible difference in the world. A strategic guide for achieving such impact is referred to as a 'logic model', which, according to Ballie et al.

(2022, p. 3) "is underpinned by a theory or change to set an empirical basis underlying a social innovation intervention".

These definitions accentuate the necessity for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to tackle complex and broad social challenges and stress the importance of theory-driven approaches to creating positive social change and value. Typically, project evaluation occurs in isolation and often near the project's conclusion. However, to improve well-being, social innovation projects must be replicable, measurable, open to critique, and guided by evidence-based plans. Among available tools for impact measurement, the Theory of Change approach is one of the most established methodologies, serving as a valuable tool for planning and evaluating social innovation projects more comprehensively. This approach offers a structured framework for identifying the current situation, future outcomes, and the necessary steps to transition from one stage to another. In doing so, it allows a deeper understanding of the causal relationships between objectives, activities, and expected outcomes and impacts of social innovation initiatives (Ballie et al., 2022).

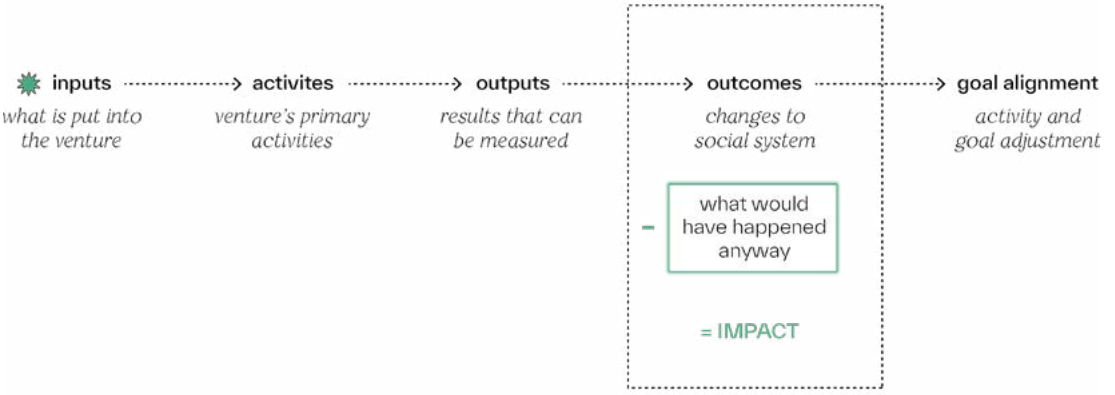
According to The Center for Theory of Change (2023), the first occurrence of the term "Theory of Change" remains unclear. However, its origins have roots in the work of evaluation theorists and practitioners, such as Carol Weiss (1995), whose research was dedicated to the development of scientific methods for evaluating social programs. In her work, she suggested that the challenges in evaluating complex community programs derive from a lack of clarity in the program's goals and in the paths to achieving them. More specifically, in the book "New Approaches to Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives" (Connell et al., 1995), summarising ideas gathered at The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, Weiss argued that stakeholders of community initiatives often disregard the intermediate steps necessary to achieve long-term goals, resulting in unclear change processes, especially at early and mid-term stages. As a result, she popularised the term 'Theory of Change' to describe the sequence of steps behind reaching long-term goals and explain how program activities connect to specific outcomes. Her approach encouraged the articulation of the sequence of outcomes resulting from community initiatives and emphasised the need for evaluation strategies to track their actual achievement. Since the publication of the book, the use of the term 'Theory of Change' has grown significantly, including further developments such as the recognition of the non-linear nature of change processes (Center for Theory of Change, 2023). Overall, the framework provides a structured methodology for understanding the causal relationships between actions, outcomes, and impacts, ensuring that activities are logically connected to achieve desired results. As explained by Maas (2009, p. 119),

"It relates to how practitioners believe individual, inter-group and social systemic change happens, and how, specifically, their actions will produce (positive) results. As such, this model builds on perception and believes of how change happens and how specific actions will lead to results".

The 'Impact Value Chain' by Clark et al. (2004) extends the idea behind the Theory of Change by not only focusing on the logical connections but also highlighting the value generated through change processes. It provides a tool for companies and organisations to maximise positive impacts while considering their social and environmental responsibilities. In doing so, the analysis of business activities expands beyond the traditional

↓ **Figure 5.24** Impact Value Chain (Clark et al., 2004, p. 7).

value chain, which primarily focuses on inputs, activities, and outputs, integrating the assessment of outcomes and impacts. The Impact Value Chain method involves the analysis of key data categories according to the following stages (Figure 5.24):



→ **1. Inputs**: resources provided to a program to fulfil its mission; these are essential for the functioning of the organisation or company.

→ **2. Activities**: actions or tasks undertaken to achieve specific objectives.

→ **3. Outputs**: direct, immediate, and measurable effects of the organisation's activities.

→ **4. Outcomes**: specific changes in individual behaviours, knowledge, and skills resulting from the organisation's operations; these are more comprehensive indicators, as they capture the transformations experienced by individual beneficiaries and communities who take part in the venture's activities.

→ **5. Impact**: it quantifies "the difference between the outcome for a sample exposed to an enterprise's activities and the outcome that would have occurred without the venture or organisation" (Clark et al., 2004, p. 17). Indicating outcomes minus what would have occurred anyway, they highlight the specific contributions of the organisation and include both intended and unintended, positive and negative, and short-term and long-term consequences.

→ **6. Goal Alignment**: the process of evaluating outcomes and impacts' alignment with desired goals.

Hence, the framework supports organisations' understanding of how social value is created, based on the previously mentioned distinction between outputs and outcomes. According to it, outputs refer to results that are directly measurable by companies and organisations, such as the number of fair wage workers employed by a brand or the percentage of garments that receive ethical certifications, while outcomes represent the desired changes aimed at making a positive impact in the world. In fashion, these outcomes could include indicators such as improved working conditions or a reduction in gender inequality. Ultimately, adopting models such as the Theory of Change or the Impact Value Chain can help organisations better communicate their commitment to social innovation and identify their contributions to promoting a more sustainable and inclusive industry.

For the purpose of this investigation, the upcoming section explores the concepts introduced in this paragraph, examining

them from a design perspective. The goal is to discuss the social and environmental significance of design, supporting the analysis by introducing an assessment model which combines the Theory of Change and the Impact Value Chain.

5.4.2 The Environmental and Social Value of Design: Design Economy 2021

Design's impact extends beyond the economic domain, influencing society, culture, the environment, and democratic practices. While some of this impact is direct and an explicit part of a design's purpose or brief, in other cases it manifests more subtly, appearing as a ripple effect generated by the design process. Inclusivity in the design process can therefore empower individuals and lead to paradigm shifts in societal behaviours, fostering further innovative design. As in other industries, these broader and often intangible impacts have been historically overshadowed by economic objectives, especially in Western capitalist contexts, where the difficulty in assessing and quantifying social and environmental values has prevented a full understanding of their potential. However, the landscape is evolving, with recent global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the rising and pressing issue of the climate crisis. Global commitments, such as the 2011 Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals developed by UN members in 2015, have encouraged collective and individual efforts to tackle social and environmental problems across all sectors. These initiatives have involved various stakeholders from activism, civil society, academia, business, and government, both on a global and local scale. Within the design field, a growing necessity is emerging to understand and evaluate the distinct contributions that designers can make in response to these challenges. This need extends to those commissioning, investing in, and using designed products, as well as those shaping design practice through education, policy, and business leadership (Bailey et al., 2022). These premises have therefore highlighted the need to value environmental and social benefits alongside financial ones. In the words of the Design Council (2021, p. 8)

"Until now, [our] reports have focused on design's financial and economic contribution when assessing the value of design. But over the past couple of years, events such as the global Covid-19 pandemic have changed the way we all value things. Likewise, universal concern about urgent issues such as the climate and biodiversity crises, racial and cultural inequalities and the impact of artificial intelligence and other technological developments has prompted us to think more holistically when we gauge the impact of any sector".

Against this background, design is often seen as a solution to address the challenges posed by the climate crisis and social inequality. Among others, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) highlights the importance of creativity and cultural diversity in achieving both economic progress and social inclusion. As demonstrated in previous sections, social innovation, driven by everyday interactions, reshapes how communities respond to social, economic, and environmental challenges. Design Thinking, which uses design principles for creative problem-solving, emerges as an effective tool for supporting social innovation and realising the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Bailey et al., 2022).

Despite the potential of this approach, to fully grasp the impacts of design, we need a more systemic, critical, and self-aware understanding that goes beyond individual projects and considers both the positive and negative aspects (Bailey et al., 2022). This is crucial to assess the overall social and

environmental impacts of design across the entire design industry. Although scholars acknowledge this growing necessity, existing literature on the social and environmental impacts of design has evolved in a fragmented manner, following different approaches to measuring environmental impacts as separate from the social. The latter have typically been viewed in terms of community-focused efforts that aim to enhance social interactions, integration, and empowerment, as in the case of Design for Social Innovation (Fassi et al., 2013; Manzini, 2014, 2015; Selloni, 2017), or literature exploring the relationship between design and activism (Fuad-Luke, 2009). A promising development in addressing methodological limitations comes instead from the focus on social value. According to the Design Council (2021, p. 45),

"value refers to significant change that happens as a result of design. It identifies what change is taken to be important to measure, whether because it is required by regulation, policy or something people care deeply about".

In this definition, 'change' is intended as "the observable, or experienced, results of applying design within a project or setting" (Design Council, 2021, p. 45). These concepts consider a wide range of outcomes, including environmental, economic, and social contributions. Unlike the one-dimensional, quantitative approach to impacts, value-centred methods emphasise the effects of design recognising the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders. This shift highlights the importance of involving the community in the design process while striving to achieve sustainability objectives on a more manageable scale. In essence, research calls for more holistic analytical concepts, which could lead to more effective methodological approaches for assessing the impact of design on both social and environmental realms (Bailey et al., 2022).

The economic value of design has been the central topic of pioneering research conducted by the Design Council in the "Design Economy" report (2015), which provided clear evidence of the financial benefits brought by design. More recent Design Economy reports (Design Council, 2021; Design Council & Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020) shifted the focus towards the social and environmental value of design, showing that poor design choices can intensify inequalities and climate challenges, while good design can enhance well-being and promote sustainability. Moreover, design often brings about ripple effects such as forming new relationships, introducing new perspectives, and other unseen impacts that contribute to additional value. Although designers and firms have been independently assessing these effects, the Design Council set the objective to develop a method to collectively measure such impacts in their Design Economy 2021 (Bailey et al., 2022), which aims to quantify the environmental, social, and broader value of design. Insights from their comprehensive research (Design Council & Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020) reveal the complexity of measuring value in design domains, with the following findings:

→ value is inherently subjective;

→ there is a lack of standardised metrics for assessing social and environmental value, with multiple frameworks existing for both aspects;

→ social value is defined as "the degree of importance that people place on the degree of social change – or impact – they experience" (Design Council & Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020, p. 5);

→ environmental value aligns closely with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which incorporate both environmental and social concerns;

→ value can be measured quantitatively or qualitatively, and measurements can be subjective (deliberative) or objective (instrumental);

→ design encompasses a wide range of practices, and is interpreted by the Design Council as a skillset and mindset;

→ due to the diversity of design, a design-specific framework is necessary, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative measures to capture the unique contributions of design in specific contexts;

From an economic perspective, value is generated through the production of good and services, the distribution of these across the market, and the reinvestment of the earnings. This implies that value creation revolves around the interactions among human, physical and intangible assets, all contributing to the production of tangible and objective results (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2022). In contrast, understandings of both social and environmental values are fragmented and varied. Throughout this research, the definition of 'social value' agrees with the one provided by the Design Council (2021), which is closely related to the idea of social impact. As previously suggested, the latter refers to the transformations related to individuals, communities, and the environment, including

"social, economic, environmental and wider community changes, which can be positive, negative, intended or unintended. These changes can also be in the short, medium or long term" (Design Council, 2021, p. 7).

On the other hand, social value describes the extent to which individuals value life-altering changes they experience. To properly assess social value, it is therefore crucial to adopt the viewpoint of those who are directly influenced by an organization's actions. Similarly, the concept of environmental value remains a subject of debate. According to the report "Moving Beyond Financial Value" (Design Council, 2021), research in environmental psychology has pointed out the inadequacy of referencing environmental values in environmental and management literature, due to the disorganised nature of these fields of study. To address this, a structured framework for understanding and conceptualising environmental value is offered by the SDGs. Here, several intersections exist between social value and environmental value, both of which are regarded as subjective concepts. Since the meaning of these notions can vary for different stakeholders, it is challenging to find a universally satisfying measurement tool. To maintain a coherent narrative and avoid misunderstandings in the exploration of environmental value, the Design Council (2021) suggests relying on SDG and treating the concept as a parallel idea to that of social value, rather than conceptualising them in a broader sense.

As demonstrated in previous sections, the measurement of values plays a significant role in shaping policy, businesses, and society as a whole. Currently, a pluralistic approach to value creation and assessment is being explored, with three main trends worth noting:

→ **1.** a shift toward a more diverse understanding of values;

→ **2.** the emergence of various measurement tools to assess value more holistically;

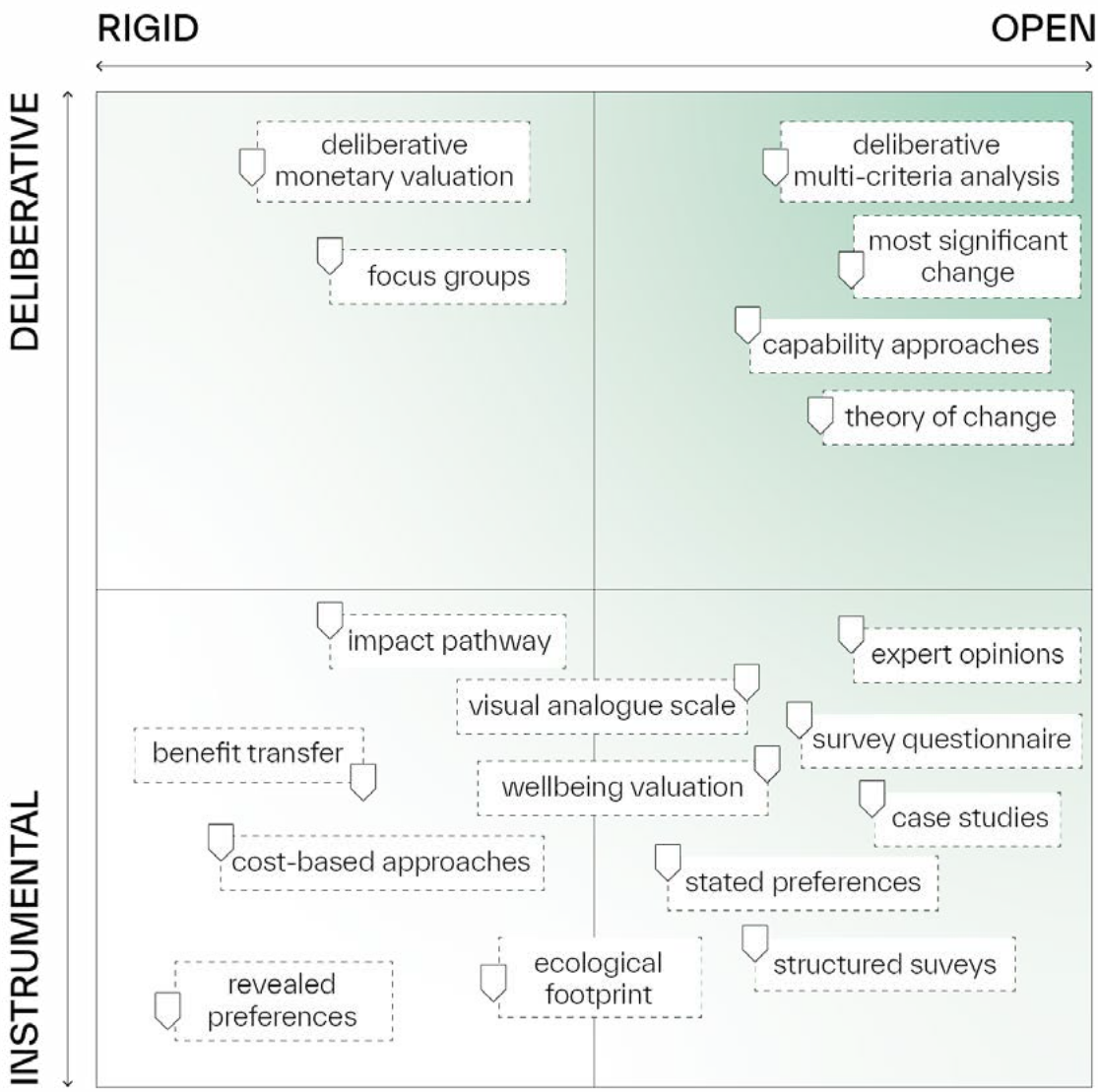
→ **3.** a growing recognition of the highly subjective nature of values.

These trends pose challenges in terms of achieving a consensus on the appropriate value framework. The pursuit of a more holistic value concept has led to the development of multiple measurement frameworks, which can be broadly categorised as quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative approaches aim to quantify social and environmental value using numbers, facilitating comparisons and communication but increasing the risks of oversimplification. These can either be monetary cost-based approaches or non-monetary approaches such as ecological footprint and life-cycle analysis. Conversely, qualitative approaches provide a deeper understanding of the value created but are less comparable and harder to aggregate. These methods include surveys, expert opinions, case studies, and emotional responses to natural and social changes.

Similarly, value measurement tools can be classified based on their approach, differentiating between instrumental and deliberative methods. According to instrumental methods, values can be objectively measured and quantified, while deliberative approaches consider value as subjective and emphasise the ongoing social process of forming values through communication, participation, social learning, and negotiation. Additionally, measurement tools can be differentiated for their flexibility or rigidity. Deliberative methods tend to be open and context-dependent, while instrumental and individual preference methods rely on statistical consistency, which makes them more rigid and often based on a narrower conceptualisation of values. Finally, the timing of value assessment is another distinguishing element: some tools enable the measurement of value creation throughout a process, capturing changes over time, while others only compare the initial and final states. Against this background, the field of design offers a wide spectrum of available measurement tools for capturing social and environmental value, as categorised in Figure 5.25.

Although non-design-specific frameworks incorporate a mix of these methods, the diverse nature of design across various disciplines makes it challenging to create a standardised tool that applies universally without losing valuable insights into the value-creation process.

In the context of the Design Economy 2021 report (Bailey et al., 2022) a hybrid approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods is considered the most appropriate for constructing an assessment framework. While there are various measurement tools available for capturing social and environmental value, the multifaceted nature of design across different disciplines makes it challenging to apply standard measurement tools without losing valuable insights generated during the design process. As each design discipline, such as fashion, product, or graphic design, generates varied forms of value due to specific contexts and modes of creating impact, attempting to assess the entirety of design's value with a single measure or tool results impractical. To address this, Kimbell et al. (2022) favour a 'project forward' approach, making predictions about future outcomes based on existing data and trends. In examining existing models and indicators for assessing design's impact, the report places particular focus on the fashion sector, considering methodologies like the Higg Index by the Sustainable Apparel Coalition - a tool for companies to evaluate sustainability factors in their supply chain - and the Fashion Transparency Index by Fashion Revolution - an annual report ranking major fashion



↑ Figure 5.25
Categorisation of measurement tools according to two dimensions: open vs. rigid, deliberate vs. instrumental (Design Council & Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020, p. 15).

brands and retailers according to their levels of transparency.

As a result of the Design Economy research, an innovative Design Value Framework was developed to allow both designers and commissioners to evaluate the overall value of design. Its development followed a deliberative methodology, involving multiple stakeholders and combining various sector-specific tools. This makes the framework the first of its kind, providing a comprehensive model for design as a whole and covering all value domains, including social, environmental, democratic, and financial impact (Design Council, 2015). The primary purpose of the report is to articulate the social and environmental impact and value of design to inform decision-making, guided by principles outlined in "Moving Beyond Financial Value" (Design Council & Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020) and the Design Council's Design Economy 2021 brief, which advocate for a multifaceted approach to quantify value in specific cases. In a broader sense, it aims to establish a foundation for comprehending the broader implications of the UK design economy in terms of social and environmental impact, with a commitment to address Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) issues (Bailey et al., 2022). The central idea is to demonstrate the positive contributions of design in addressing urgent issues like climate change, equity, and diversity, while also emphasising that these broader values should be fundamental in all efforts. Indeed, measuring these values means making them visible and bringing them into focus during the design process. This not only reveals the broader effects of design, but also uncovers hidden and

unintended consequences. This way, the framework encourages capturing the full value of design, enhancing decision-making, and ultimately triggering a shift in the industry towards prioritising these fundamental values. In essence, it embraces the ideas that

"what gets measured, gets done" (Design Council, 2021, p. 5), and that **"a change in what we value can have a profound effect on design practice" (Design Council, 2021, p. 11).**

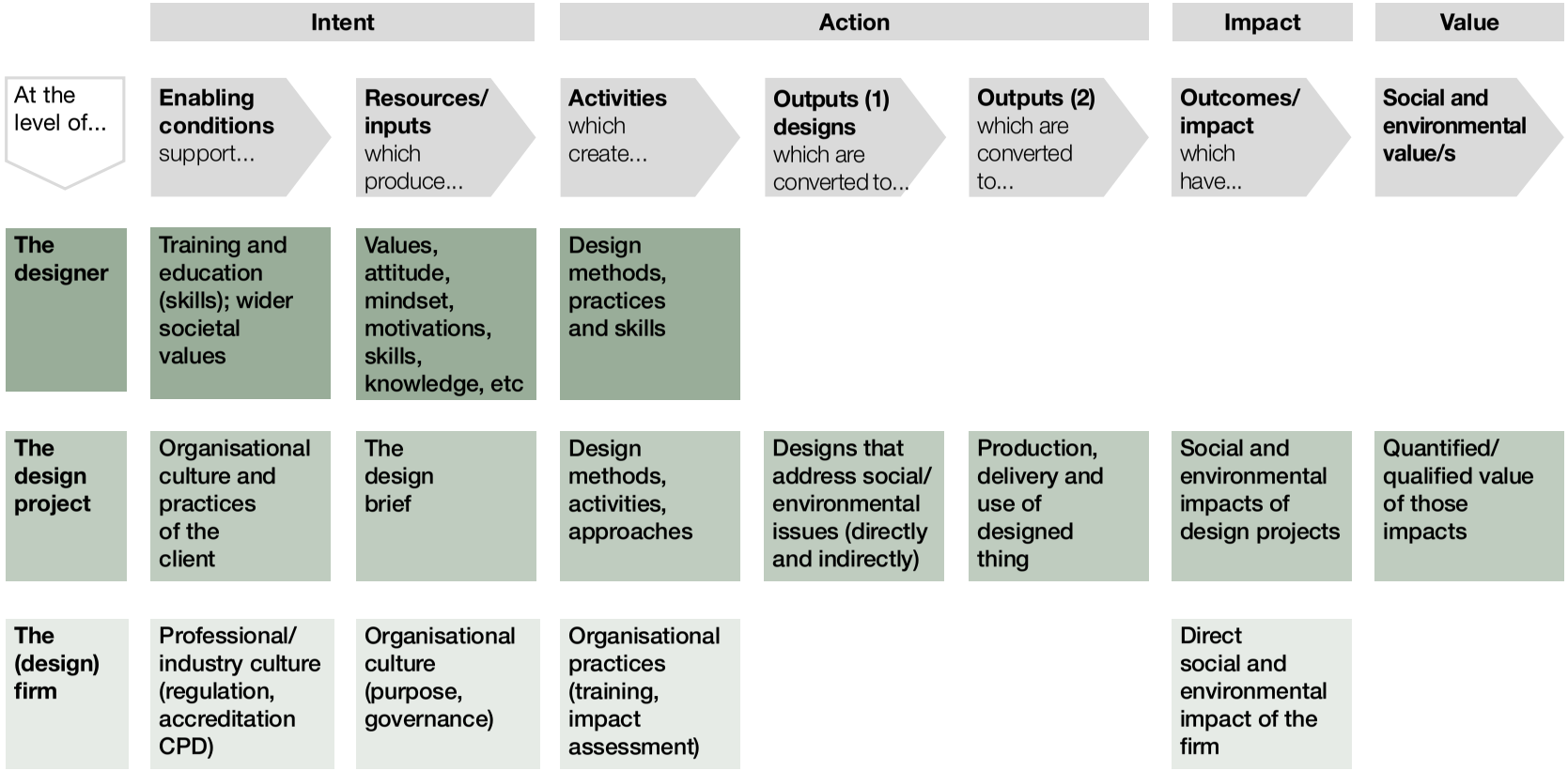
For brands and organisations, this means understanding the broader impacts of their work to guide the creation of more ethical products and services, as well as engaging in sustainable communication.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, contemporary brands not only have to respond to customer needs but are also expected to tackle global concerns in a transparent way. The current challenge is therefore to define which values will be crucial in a more equal and sustainable future, despite them being undervalued at the moment. Just as values change, we need a flexible value system that can adapt and evolve (Design Council, 2021). To this end, the initial frameworks developed by the Design Council could be refined in the future through an iterative and deliberative process involving designers and society at large.

To articulate how design produces social and environmental value and demonstrate pathways to enhance positive impacts, the Design Economy 2021 analysis (Bailey et al., 2022) is supported by both a Theory of Change - integrating an Impact Value Chain - and an Impact Framework. The former outlines the connections between design activities and social and environmental outcomes at a broader level, focusing on the temporal aspects and considering how design activities lead to impacts over time. The latter is instead spatial in nature and deals with the specific kinds of impact associated with design. The use of these complementary frameworks contributes to a comprehensive understanding of design's role in addressing contemporary challenges.

Although theories of change have a complex relationship with academic research, as they often fail to effectively translate to practice, in this case, they offer an effective solution to the lack of a standardised methodological approach. Their linear form is efficient in outlining the factors that shape and produce the social and environmental value of design, resulting in a structured qualitative method to address contemporary issues through design. Within this context, 'design' is considered by Bailey et al. (2022) as an area of activity rather than just a product or plan, describing the combined effects of designers, design organisations, design projects, and the broader contexts in which issues are framed, agendas are established, resources are allocated, projects are executed, and value emerges. This method assumes a connection between designers' intentions, their actions, and the resulting outcomes, acknowledging both positive social and environmental value and the potential for negative impacts. It also takes into consideration the ripple effect, a significant aspect of design that is challenging to quantify, and presents a pathway to educate professionals in design-related fields, encouraging them to intentionally integrate the creation of social and environmental values into their design activities (Design Council & Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020). As this Theory of Change (Figure 5.26) connects the value created by design to specific actions through a causal pathway, it is crucial to understand each stage within it. The core concepts covered by the Theory of Change are the following (Bailey et al., 2022):

→ **Intent**: it refers to the intentions, attitudes, and concerns of designers and users of design skills, which, together with



At the level of...	Intent: Enabling conditions support...	Intent: Resources/ inputs which produce...	Action: Activities which create...	Action: Outputs (1) designs which are converted to...	Action: Outputs (2) which are converted to...	Impact: Outcomes/ impact which have...	Value: Social and environmental value/s
The designer	Training and education (skills); wider societal values	Values, attitude, mindset, motivations, skills, knowledge, etc	Design methods, practices and skills				
The design project	Organisational culture and practices of the client	The design brief	Design methods, activities, approaches	Designs that address social/ environmental issues (directly and indirectly)	Production, delivery and use of designed thing	Social and environmental impacts of design projects	Quantified/ qualified value of those impacts
The (design) firm	Professional/ industry culture (regulation, accreditation CPD)	Organisational culture (purpose, governance)	Organisational practices (training, impact assessment)			Direct social and environmental impact of the firm	

↑ **Figure 5.26** Diagram summarising the Theory of Change to assess the social and environmental value of design for Design Economy 2021 (Bailey et al., 2022, p. 10).

↓ **Figure 5.27** Impact Framework summarising the four types of capital through which design creates value in specific projects and organisations, with example indicators (Bailey et al., 2022, p. 16).

organisational factors such as the design brief, determine whether the design work will deliver social and environmental value. It is fundamental to understand that these intentions are however shaped by societal influence, and influenced by regulation, norms, education, professional culture, and more.

→ **2. Action**: it mainly occurs during the design phase, where impact is configured through decisions and product specification. Among the methods and activities employed by designers, some are intended to result in positive social and environmental value, while others appear as core design practices. Similarly, the resulting designs may specifically address social and environmental issues or may produce value as a spill-over effect. Moreover, design firms and entities may engage in activities that create value outside of specific design projects.

→ **3. Impact**: it encompasses the downstream consequences that occur after the design phase, such as during production, use, disposal, or re-use. Assessing this impact can be challenging due to the diversity of design disciplines and the range of potential impacts throughout a product's lifecycle. While some design disciplines have established metrics and tools for assessing social and environmental impacts, others are less advanced.

→ **4. Value**: the final stage in the value chain is the assessment of the importance of the social and environmental impacts of design. It can be generated through the design process, the outcomes of design, and the broader activities of design firms or organisations. These dimensions of value may be expressed quantitatively or qualitatively.

Alongside the Theory of Change, Bailey et al. (2022) constructed an Impact Framework to articulate the specific contributions of design in this process. To evaluate the effects of design on society and the environment, they recommend the establishment of a relevant set of impact metrics that can be easily understood by participants in the design industry. To do so, the Impact Framework (Figure 5.27) combines elements from the 'four capitals' approach and emphasises the importance of

Project Level	**Social Capital**	**Environmental Capital**	**Environmental Capital**	**Financial Capital**
Design	Skills development Equitable hiring	Global warming potential Emissions, waste, pollution	Quality of decision-making Diverse inputs	Life cycle social and environmental costing
Implementation	Connection between staff and stakeholders	Emissions, waste, pollution Resource use	Diverse feedback Autonomy and flexibility	Employment generation
Use	Health and well-being of users/ beneficiaries	Emissions, waste, pollution Resource use	Equitable dialogue with users/ beneficiaries	Equitable and ethical generation of wealth

Organisation Level	**Social Capital**	**Environmental Capital**	**Environmental Capital**	**Financial Capital**
Strategy	Connections between staff and stakeholders Common purpose	Emissions, waste, pollution Resource use	Stakeholder involvement Governance quality	Inclusive growth Uncertainty management
Operations	Work life balance Employee satisfaction	Emissions, waste, pollution Resource use	Agency and dignity in interactions	Ethical procurement Asset management
Infrastructure	Local employment Equitable HR practices	Bio-diversity loss Fossil fuel depletion	Diverse and inclusive engagement	Equitable (re)distribution Shared ownership

democratic accountability within participatory design research and practice. Moreover, it differentiates between design projects - design, implementation, and use - and organisations - strategy, operations, and infrastructure.

The four capitals linked to value creation in the Impact Framework are expressed as follows (Bailey et al., 2022; Design Council, 2021):

→ **Environmental capital**: the combination of renewable and non-renewable resources and assets which the design economy relies on and affects through various design phases; this type of capital encourages re-cycling, re-use, and regeneration through design activities. Common ways to measure this value include carbon footprints and behavioural change towards sustainable lifestyles.

→ **Social capital**: the tangible and intangible resources that the design economy depends on and influences, such as skills, beliefs and relationships that shape our way of living; these should be inclusive to prevent marginalisation from society and in the design economy. Other example indicators are standards of health and well-being, the preservation of heritage, and social cohesion.

→ **Democratic capital**: the narratives, beliefs, norms, and actions that influence collective decision-making and governance within the design economy, encouraging equality in organisations, communities, and nations. Typical measurements include degrees of diversity, transparency, and accountability in organisations.

→ **Financial capital**: assets, resources, and processes that ensure economic sustainability, along with associated methods for understanding investment, returns, risk, and resilience. It includes indicators like contribution to local economies, the adoption of alternative business models, and social and environmental investments.

These capitals collectively demonstrate the multidimensional value of design and strengthen its potential to address contemporary challenges. However, it is important to highlight that the significance of design goes beyond easily quantifiable impacts and extends to what is defined as 'wider value' (Design Council, 2021, p. 24), usually related to indirect benefits or spillover effects. It concerns value that has a generative quality, as it creates the enabling conditions for further design, innovation, and value to develop, ultimately supporting larger systemic transformations. Measuring wider value is challenging due to its unpredictability and abstract nature, as in the case of shifts in mindset toward concepts like sustainability. Moreover, it may become evident only in the long term, and we may lack the necessary tools or awareness to measure values that will be relevant in the future. To contrast these limitations, the framework presented in this paragraph offers a flexible structure. This structure is designed to identify, integrate, and assess these evolving values during the design process, ultimately leading to a shift in the industry towards prioritising them.

Building upon these foundations, the next section takes a closer look at impact measurement within the fashion communication domain, introducing The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook, co-published by UNEP and UN Climate Change (Arthur, 2023). This explores the complexities surrounding this assessment and provides valuable insights into the role of fashion communication in promoting a narrative shift towards sustainability and equity.

5.4.3 Shifting Narratives: The Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook

A deeper analysis of the fashion sector conducted in the Design Economy 2021 report (Bailey et al., 2022) highlights the diverse landscape of impact assessment tools and methods in the fashion industry and examines the existing gaps in achieving a comprehensive overview of design's role. Key insights from the research indicate that:

→ there is a lack of a standardised approach, set of indicators, or common framework for assessing the social and environmental impacts of fashion;

→ aggregating impact assessments from the product level to the broader contexts of companies or national economies is a challenging task;

→ although some case studies demonstrate social and environmental impacts, these findings are confined to specific cases.

Despite these difficulties, the adoption of frameworks and assessment tools across different companies is gradually transforming the landscape. For instance, the Higg Index, developed by the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, provides a standard approach to measure sustainability impacts in the apparel and footwear industry. Similarly, the Fashion Transparency Index, created by Fashion Revolution, ranks fashion brands based on their disclosure of social and environmental policies, practices, and impacts. Often, brands set internal sustainability goals and measure their activities against them. However, as qualitative results are hard to obtain, some companies use a traffic light system to assess their performance. The integrated nature of the fashion sector provides a unique perspective on the role of design in shaping social and environmental outcomes, making it theoretically easier to determine its impact. However, no uniform metric exists, and diverse tools are often employed that do not cover the full spectrum of social and environmental impacts outlined in the research. Therefore, the fashion sector presents an opportunity to develop frameworks, tools, methods, and datasets relevant to other design fields. Despite this potential, practical implementation remains a challenge, as no comprehensive framework has been universally adopted to date.

A response to the failure of the fashion industry to meet sustainability goals and commit to global initiatives like the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change has been the publication of the Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook (Arthur, 2023). This was developed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action (Fashion Charter) and addresses the need for the fashion sector to shift its communication efforts towards sustainability. Even though it is not intended to function as an impact assessment model, the Playbook serves as a key focal point of this research, as it offers valuable insights into the potential of fashion communication to impact various aspects of society, culture, and the environment. Recognising the cultural influence that fashion can achieve through its storytelling and visuals, it presents a framework for fashion communicators to counter misinformation, reduce messages promoting overconsumption, redirect aspirations toward sustainable lifestyles, and empower consumers to demand action from companies and governance. It is designed for

professionals involved in fashion communication - in sectors like marketing, branding, advertising, public relations, creative direction, media, content creation, and social media - and for the wider communication ecosystem - including agencies, fashion and news media, image-makers, digital platforms, influencers, advocacy groups, and educators. It aims to offer shared principles to align communication directed towards consumers with environmental and social sustainability targets, allowing a narrative shift from volume growth to well-being improvement.

Concerning this, it is essential to clarify that the term 'sustainable fashion communication' addressed by the Playbook is not limited to discussing sustainability within fashion. Instead, it involves incorporating sustainability principles into all consumer communication to promote sustainable consumption and lifestyles and enhance consumer education and awareness. In this context, sustainability is interpreted as a broader spectrum than environmental impacts, extending to social justice, equality, and diversity issues. Also, the Playbook is relevant to all fashion communicators, regardless of their previous involvement in sustainability efforts.

Despite its focus on consumer-facing communication, the Playbook acknowledges the need for systemic transformations at the business, societal, and policy levels, agreeing that governments and companies must ensure access to sustainable solutions and the well-being of all. The broader aim is in fact to encourage audiences to demand more from businesses and policymakers, promoting accountability across the fashion sector. As stated,

"This is not about educating communicators on sustainability so much as it is about asking them to put their existing skill sets to the task of redirecting and reimagining how people engage with fashion. The balance between the science of sustainability and reimagining the fashion narrative is where communicators can excel. Approached creatively, there is a distinct value opportunity at play in this new paradigm" (Arthur, 2023, p. 5).

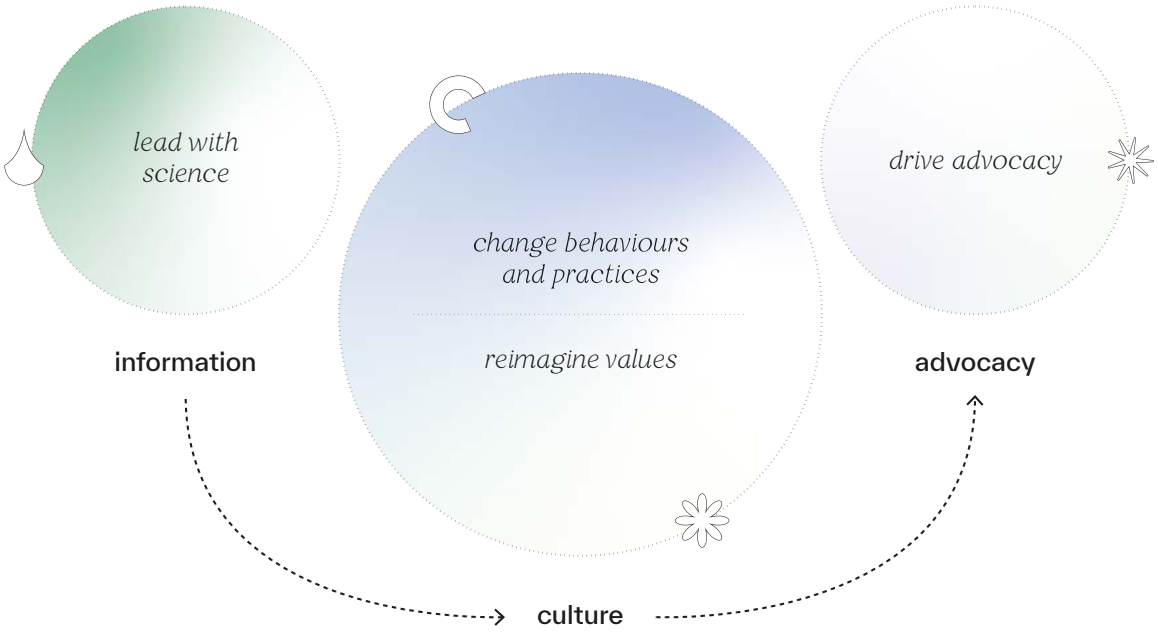
Traditionally, consumer-facing communicators have been largely excluded from sustainability discussions, leading to a disconnect between sustainability commitments and consumer-focused messaging. This gap has given rise to greenwashing in response to the growing consumer demand for sustainable fashion products. To drive communication change, it is essential to prioritise evidence, translating technical, science-based information into meaningful messaging. Transparency appears as a key value, as demonstrated by the fact that, although 98% of consumers believe that brands should contribute to positive change concerning fair labour practices and environmental sustainability, a significant portion of Millennials and Generation Z doubt the honesty of brands regarding these issues (Futerra, 2019). Furthermore, achieving true sustainability in the fashion industry also requires a shift in the cultural narrative related to consumption. This transformation extends beyond the industry's ecological impact, addressing the influence of fashion communication on consumption patterns through various channels such as fashion shows, marketing events, advertising campaigns, editorial shoots, and social media platforms. Fashion, as a central element of culture, has the potential to significantly impact sustainable lifestyles, using its role to establish new cultural norms and expectations, contributing to positive change for both people and the planet. This is especially important considering a relevant disparity between consumers' intentions and actions, as research indicates that, while 71% of global consumers express concerns about sustainability in the fashion industry, only 3% of them are willing to pay extra for sustainable products (Sanghi et

al., 2022). To address this issue, redefining value is an area where communicators can make a difference, given that value is closely linked to aspirations, which communicators can significantly influence. Transforming these desires and establishing new cultural norms, while taking practical actions for change as recommended by the Playbook, holds significant potential in the present context. However, it is important to remember that encouraging communicators to facilitate change also requires us to address the systemic issues they exist within, especially in our profit-driven economy (Arthur, 2023).

The Playbook is built on several key principles for sustainable fashion communication (Figure 5.28), providing a clear framework for communicators to align their work to sustainability targets. The first principle, "Lead with science", serves as the foundational layer, emphasising scientific accuracy, transparency, and accessibility. The next two principles, "Change behaviours and practices" and "Reimagine values", together constitute the cultural layer. They focus on constructing new narratives, extending beyond the mere presentation of data and encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and understand the value of their actions. This area is the one that requires the most effort and creativity to drive systemic change, involving a broad range of stakeholders. The final principle, "Drive advocacy", represents the leadership level of sustainable fashion communication. This phase is not focused on individual organisations and design practices, but rather on supporting broader changes within fashion. The Playbook elaborates on each of these areas, offering practical guidance and serving as a concrete starting point for effective fashion communication efforts based on the outlined principles.

As mentioned, at the foundational level of sustainable fashion communication, the central principle identified in the Playbook is "Lead with Science". It emphasises the importance of providing clear and transparent information, which must be backed by evidence, data-driven, and aligned with relevant regulations. In the domain of sustainable fashion, critical challenges are represented by misinformation and greenwashing: with sustainability becoming a selling point for brands, the fashion industry has witnessed an abundance of information across various channels - including advertising, marketing, media, and packaging - much of which is incomplete and unreliable. This information overload has created a confusing landscape for fashion consumers, who often find it challenging to distinguish real sustainability from greenwashing, with growing mistrust towards brands and media. In this context, leading with science becomes a fundamental solution. To begin, transparency is essential to differentiate genuine commitment to sustainability from superficial marketing, as it involves the public disclosure of information that empowers individuals to hold decision-makers accountable. Achieving transparency requires brands to have a comprehensive understanding of their supply chain and operations. Committing to evidence-based communication and transparency, sustainable fashion communication can ultimately lay the foundation for a more informed dialogue with customers.

The cultural dimension of sustainable fashion communication focuses on individual consumers and their role in adopting sustainable behaviours. It addresses the challenge of redefining value, detaching from the growth and profit-driven approach commonly used in fashion. The industry has traditionally promoted overconsumption, taking advantage of the temporary nature of trends to sell products. According to the Playbook, the current goal is to shift away from the promotion of excessive consumption by discouraging messages that encourage excessive buying and



Principle 1: Commit to evidence-based and transparent communication efforts	**Principle 3**: Eradicate all messages encouraging overconsumption	**Principle 7**: Motivate and mobilise the public to advocate for broader change
Principle 2: Ensure information is shared in a clear and accessible manner	**Principle 4**: Champion positive changes and demonstrate accessible circular solutions to help individuals live more sustainable lifestyles	**Principle 8**: Support dialogue with leadership and policymakers to enable wider industry sustainability
	Principle 5: Spotlight new role models and notions of aspiration or success	
	Principle 6: Focus on inclusive marketing and storytelling that celebrates the positive ecological, cultural and social values of fashion	

↑ **Figure 5.28** The principles for sustainable fashion communication (Arthur, 2023, p. 28).

by redefining the perception of shopping as a reward. Beyond information, sustainable fashion communication must embrace the emotional aspects of decision-making, illustrating how consumers can embrace sustainable lifestyles. To this end, visual communication is particularly important in engaging audiences.

Reimagining values in sustainable fashion communication involves reshaping beliefs about material consumption and ownership as sources of happiness and success. This process requires storytelling and imagery that demonstrate alternative models of status and success, disconnecting identity from the pursuit of new possessions. This shift in cultural norms is essential for behaviour change and influencing social values. As communicators have a role in changing what is considered acceptable in society, sustainable communication should emphasise the ecological, cultural, and social values of the fashion sector, highlighting its impact on nature, biodiversity, animal welfare, garment workers, and marginalised communities.

→ **Figure 5.29** Example of practical dos and don'ts guide in the Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook, related to Principle 5: Spotlight new role models and notions of aspiration or success (Arthur, 2023, pp. 57–58).

↘ **Figure 5.30** Example of checklist in the Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook, related to Principle 5: Spotlight new role models and notions of aspiration or success (Arthur, 2023, p. 58).

Finally, at the leadership level of sustainable fashion communication, industry leaders must motivate the public to advocate for systemic change, educate stakeholders about evolving sustainability, and encourage policymakers to establish measures that promote sustainability across the fashion industry. This institutional approach acknowledges that current global challenges require systemic shifts in business, society, and policy, other than individual behaviour change. For these reasons, fashion communicators must empower citizens to challenge harmful norms, question industry decisions, and hold stakeholders accountable, advocating for collective action and policy support for a more sustainable fashion industry. Although many fashion organisations use their platforms to discuss social issues, it is still essential for businesses to take action rather than just communicate their support. Moreover, communicators can also facilitate collective action by bringing stakeholders together, presenting positive industry visions, and inspiring collaborative solutions. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022), mobilising just 3.5% of the population can trigger significant change, and as few as 10-30% of committed individuals can establish new social norms.

In summary, the Playbook offers a practical framework for fashion communicators, aligning their work with sustainability targets and empowering them to guide systemic transformations. Throughout the report, the explanation of each principle is coupled with practical guidance, including a list of dos and don'ts, exemplified in Figure 5.29, and a checklist for reference, as in Figure 5.30. Through these tools, its purpose is to serve as a concrete starting point for sustainable fashion communication based on the outlined principles.

Besides these tools, the final part of the Playbook outlines measures of success, providing a model to assist communicators in assessing various metrics effectively. These indicators are summarised by the framework in Figure 5.31 and Figure 5.32.

This final step acknowledges the importance of impact assessment in the design process, emphasising the importance for fashion communicators to integrate the principles in their internal reporting, beyond implementing them in their daily practice. Among the "Actions for Communicators", the Playbook suggests

"Integrate the principles in [their] internal reporting framework to monitor progress and drive further improvement, creating an accountability and governance structure against them" (Arthur, 2023, p. 30).

This structure refers to the development of a system or model to support the company's decision-making processes, establishing roles and policies, and monitoring of progress towards sustainability goals in fashion communication activities. As we transition to the final sections of the research, where the Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Communication will be uncovered, it is clear that the development of an 'accountability and governance structure' appears a crucial foundational element of this investigation. This framework will serve as a structure for monitoring progress, promoting accountability and transparency, and ultimately supporting the integration of social impact assessment principles into fashion brands' communication practices.

DO	DON'T
Demonstrate new visions of status and success, presenting a visual narrative (via imagery, video, text, experiences, events and beyond) of aspirational sustainable lifestyles, wellbeing and community.	Suggest self-esteem and social status are separate from or clashing with sustainability. Do not include stereotypical or patriarchal examples that reinforce harmful norms and behaviours.
Socialise examples of valuing fashion outside of material wealth, including circular alternatives as highlighted under 'Changing Behaviours and Practices', as well as new notions of wellbeing and fulfilment. This could include passing things down to future generations, making and repairing emotionally resonant items or reconnecting with traditional techniques to maintain them, sharing positive stories that demonstrate community connections or belonging, engaging in status though digital fashion and more.	Infer that shopping and consumption are a means to emotional fulfilment, or that newness and volume is aspirational.
Promote sustainability (including both reduced and responsible consumption) as cool and desirable over worthy or charitable. Make it something consumers want to engage with.	Guilt consumers into participating in sustainability, present a picture of doom and gloom, or suggest abstinence and sacrifice is the only option for engagement. Similarly, do not shame those who cannot afford otherwise.
Promote positive gender narratives, dispelling myths on body types and what is considered 'attractive' particularly for women and girls.	Push consumption by praying on body image issues and mental health.
Bring your sustainability teams into the creative space of communicating sustainable lifestyles and values with the aim of shaping new cultural norms and expectations.	Operate in silos between the two different departments, negating the opportunity to gain input on wider communication work and vice versa.
Turn to or nurture relevant social influencers and thought leaders to support and spread the message (from repeat wears and rental fashion to broader pro-sustainability attitudes), in the process helping to social-proof it.	Work with ambassadors, models or spokespeople for one-off moments who do not holistically embody your values and beliefs, nor serve as role models for the bigger picture you are presenting. Similarly, do not work with influencers who otherwise heavily promote overconsumption (such as by rewarding or promoting unboxing or haul videos).
Use cultural moments and ambassadors to normalise sustainable behaviours, connecting with your audiences at the moments that matter.	Share environmental or social messages only on recognised awareness days, such as International Women's Day, World Environment Day or Earth Day.

Checklist:

- [ ] Does the communication activity promote new notions of value, status, success and wellbeing?
- [ ] Are influencers and opinion leaders involved to help social proof sustainability?
- [ ] Do the beliefs and values of the ambassadors involved align to that of the message?
- [ ] Are sustainability teams embedded in communication activity at large?

↓ **Figure 5.31** Suggested framework indicating measures of success, related to the first and second principles (Arthur, 2023, p. 89).

Theme	**Principles**	**Measure** Indicator communicators are directly accountable for	**Outcome** Indicator communicators can help influence
Lead with science	- Commit to evidence-based and transparent communication efforts - Ensure information is shared in a clear and accessible manner	- Number of businesses providing credible sustainability information on products and services at point of sale - Number of businesses understanding and complying with emerging environmental claims codes - Number of businesses increasing transparency by publishing credible sustainability information and presenting it in a clear and accessible way to the consumer - Percent of businesses working with established third-party certification schemes and standards to provide evidence and substantiate claims - Increase in number of businesses providing traceability on all claims, offering access to methodology and sources used	- Increase in consumer understanding and awareness of key environmental and social impacts of products, industry - Shift in purchase intention and action towards lower impact options - Low/few incidents of legal or regulatory rulings for inaccurate or misleading environmental or social claims in fashion - Number of businesses adopting life cycle approach - Industry-wide increase in data accessibility and quantifiable information
Change behaviours and practices	- Eradicate all messages encouraging overconsumption - Champion positive changes and demonstrate accessible circular solutions to help individuals live more sustainable lifestyles	- Reduction in sales tactics such as one-off promotions, multi-buy offers, limited runs and free returns - Reduction in elevation of overconsumption messages such as haul videos on social media - Increase in number and percentage of messages and moments promoting alternative business models (such as rental, resale) and better use phase impacts (including care and repair) - Increase in understanding and purchase intent of more sustainable and circular business models and options - Percent of consumers with positive views of circular and sustainable business models - Number of new and retained users for new circular business models - Increase in awareness of lower-impact usage, including care and repair - Percent of consumers reporting low-impact care behaviour and actions to increase longevity	- Number of companies reporting on production volumes of new product - Reduction in new items produced - Increase in percent of global fashion sales through circular and sustainable business models - Number of organisations with >50% of revenue from circular and sustainable business models (number of businesses decoupling value creation from volume production) - Reduction in communication teams measured against sales of new product or volume growth, rather performance across the SDGs, tying in economic, social and environmental factors - Reduction of consumption levels in developed countries and products per capita - Increased duration and number of uses per product per capita - Reduced impact from washing, clothing care, with shift to lower frequency, less water, heat and chemical use - Growth in the scale of market revenue from repair and refurbishment businesses - Growth in number of items collected and recycled - Number of companies fairly and clearly communicating pricing relative to environmental and social factors - Number of companies committed to paying a living wage

↓ **Figure 5.32** Suggested framework indicating measures of success, related to the third and fourth principles (Arthur, 2023, p. 90).

Theme	**Principles**	**Measure** Indicator communicators are directly accountable for	**Outcome** Indicator communicators can help influence
Reimagine values	- Spotlight new role models and notions of aspiration or success - Focus on inclusive marketing and storytelling that celebrates the positive ecological, cultural and social values of fashion	- Increase in number and frequency of messages encouraging sustainable lifestyles and enjoying fashion outside of consumption - Number of organisations exclusively promoting sustainable values, products and messages across all channels - Increase in number and frequency of messages that align sustainable or circular options with aspiration or social status - Increase in influencers, celebrities and opinion leaders actively participating in and posting about sustainable fashion/lifestyles and different consumption models - Increase in number and frequency of more diverse and inclusive imagery, and in the teams creating it - Increase in positive gender narratives associated with fashion - Number and frequency of references to intersections of fashion with ecological, social and cultural values - Increase in storytelling amplifying diverse voices, local communities and grassroots initiatives	- Positive shift in public opinion, attitudes, and actions in support of sustainable fashion - Marked improvement in the social status of sustainable fashion, such as through popular culture references - Shift in cultural norms and expectations tied to fashion consumption - Number of organisations with explicit focus on emotional longevity in product design and styles - Increase in number of organisations that offer consumer experiences outside of purchase or consumption of material goods - Increase in global consumer awareness of fashion's intersectionality - Number of organisations employing models of success focused on wider stakeholder value, e.g. performance across the SDGs, tying in economic, social and environmental factors
Drive advocacy	- Motivate and mobilise the public to advocate for broader change - Support dialogue with leadership and policymakers to enable wider industry sustainability	- Increase in storytelling focused on advocacy and activism, and in action-based recommendations for consumer engagement with the system - Increase in organisations offering feedback mechanisms for stakeholders on sustainability - Increase in number of people and groups mobilised to join advocacy platforms - Increase in number of organisations supporting and championing wider causes than their own - Increase in number of organisations actively engaged with policy discussions - Percent of consumers considering themselves educated on sustainability - Percent of industry stakeholders considering themselves educated on sustainability - Number of organisations with a communication representative supporting multi-stakeholder industry initiatives	- Number of consumers vocalising / sharing information on sustainable fashion with their own networks or actively participating in sustainable fashion movement - Increase in industry stakeholders and stakeholder types engaged in sustainable fashion - Increase in number and type of stakeholders challenging the industry status quo across social justice and environmental issues - Increase in engagement between government and fashion sector across key markets - Increase in stakeholder support for new investment, infrastructure and policies for sustainable fashion - Increase in policy frameworks for sustainable claims - Increase in policy frameworks relative to change needed across the value chain, including for production and consumption - Increase in relative outputs and measures of success from multi-stakeholder industry initiatives

5.5 Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication

5.5.1 Conceptual Framework

Transitioning from a phase of analysis, this research culminates in the development of a Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Communication. The model is rooted in previously explored theories and tools, like the Theory of Change for the social and environmental impact of design for Design Economy 2021 (Bailey et al., 2022), and the Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook (Arthur, 2023). These laid the groundwork for understanding social media activism's impact on fashion brand communication and have been adapted and refined to address the research's objectives.

The conceptual base of the model is drawn from the Theory of Change and Impact Framework originally part of the Design Economy 2021 report. The integration of this model ensures that the framework is constructed based on established methodologies for assessing the broader impact of design processes. By adapting these perspectives to the specific context of social media activism and fashion brand communication, the model also guarantees relevance within contemporary fashion industry dynamics.

Inspired by the Design Economy 2021 model, and more generally by the institutional perspectives on social innovation explored in previous sections, the framework adopts a three-level approach, distinguishing between consumers, stakeholders, and brands. These levels, while originally conceived for broader societal change, have been adeptly tailored to the fashion communication landscape. Each level represents a different dimension of influence, recognising the diverse roles played by different actors in social media activism cases.

Beyond its conceptual value, the framework functions as a pragmatic guide for industry practitioners to navigate the challenging intersections between brand communication and consumer activism. It acts as a self-assessment tool by offering a structured approach to monitor progress over several dimensions, promote accountability and transparency, and integrate social impact assessment principles into fashion brands' communication practices. To achieve this, it integrates elements from the Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook, such as the checklist format and key qualitative parameters. The model provides a step-by-step evaluation process, incorporating specific questions and metrics at each stage, making it a practical instrument for those involved in fashion communication. The checklist format ensures users can systematically assess and enhance their practices, encouraging a more sustainable and socially responsible approach.

This way, the framework not only aims to understand the nature of the impact but also serves as a roadmap for fashion brands and stakeholders to align their strategies with broader social and environmental goals.

Below, the structure of the Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication (Figure 5.33) is described at

each step of the Value Chain, together with the identified sets of questions which guide its application.

→ **1. Enabling conditions**: The Impact Value Chain begins with the analysis of societal and cultural factors empowering consumers and stakeholders to engage in social discussions, as well as the broader context in which brands operate. At the Consumer Level, external elements such as the digital landscape and societal conditions are explored to comprehend how consumers participate in social media activism. Moving to the Stakeholder Level, the framework recognises stakeholders' influential role in shaping the narrative around social issues in the fashion industry. These stakeholders are subject to changing expectations and interactions, influencing their alignment with brand associations and their management of reputational risks. Lastly, at the Brand and Policy Level, the model offers the opportunity for brands to comprehend the cultural and societal environment in which they operate, as well as their engagement with social topics. The following questions guide the analysis:

→ **Consumer Level**: What societal and cultural conditions empower consumers to engage in social discussions? How does the digital landscape shape their ethical concerns and affect activism practices?

→ **Stakeholder Level**: How are stakeholders and media outlets impacted by changing expectations and interactions? What responsibilities do they have in terms of brand associations and reputational risks?

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: What are the brand narrative and core values? How does the brand interact with their audience on social media? Does the brand engage with social topics? What is the brand's reputation and has it been compromised?

→ **2. Inputs and Resources**: This phase offers insights into the underlying motivations and pressures that trigger activism efforts, as well as the resources leveraged by those. It examines the values, demands, and digital tools driving consumer actions, providing the opportunity to identify their specific demands and the reasoning behind them. Similarly, it dives into stakeholders' motivations to engage with activism, highlighting common goals and values they might share with activists. Lastly, at the Brand and Policy Level, the framework directs attention to brands, encouraging them to recognize the external pressures that shape their approach to activism, and whether this approach resonates with consumers. This stage includes the following topics:

→ **Consumer Level**: What values motivate consumers to participate in social media activism? What are the specific demands from consumers? What digital tools facilitate the expression of these concerns?

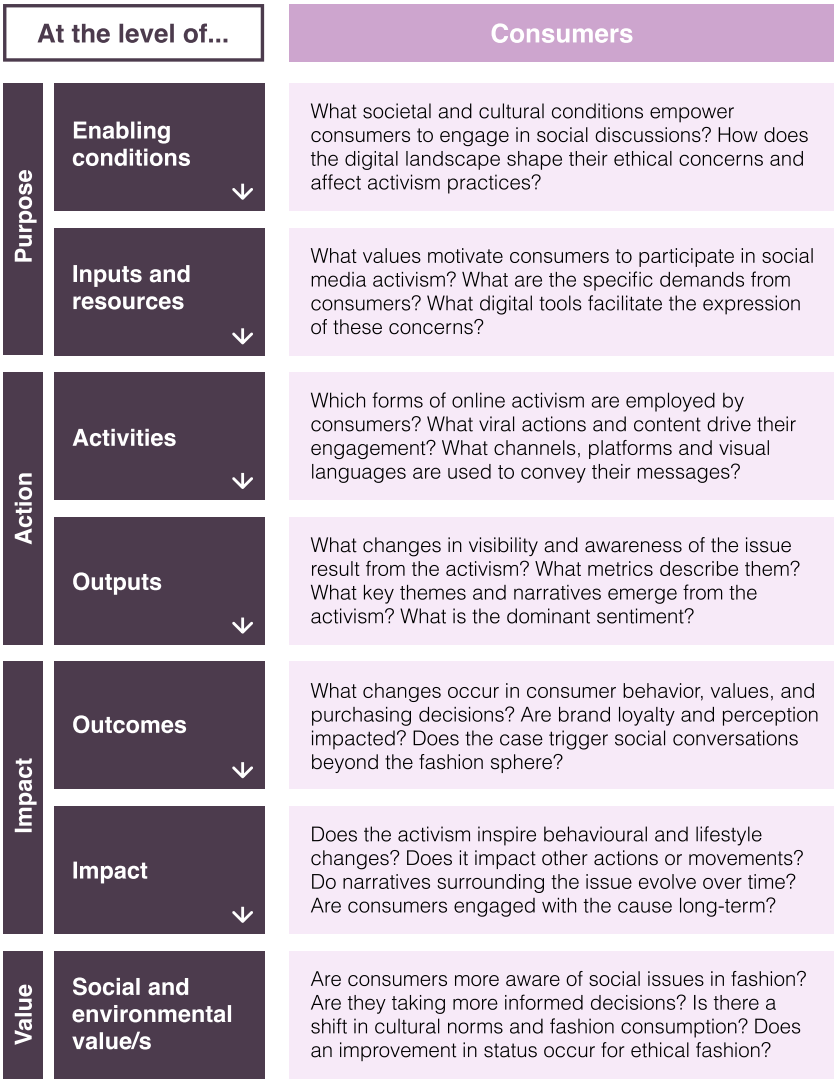
→ **Stakeholder Level**: What drives stakeholders to engage with or respond to social media activism? What common goals and values do they share with activists? What concerns and priorities impact their participation in social discourse?

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: What external pressures influence the brand's approach to activism? How do brand values align with societal expectations? How does brand behaviour trigger consumer activism? How do past experiences and consumer reactions inform decision-making processes?

These first two phases constitute the 'Purpose' dimension of the model, analysing the stages and overall context before activism efforts occur.

→ **3.** At the **Activities** stage, the model dissects the diverse actions and mechanisms employed by consumers, stakeholders, and brands. First, it focuses on the forms of online activism consumers employ and their chosen channels for conveying

→ **Figure 5.33** Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication.



messages, providing insights into their methods of engagement. Secondly, it examines how stakeholders contribute to activism or resist it and how the media portrays the activism efforts. For brands, understanding the range of actions taken to address social and environmental issues is essential. Their engagement strategies, choice of platforms, tone, and messaging all contribute to shaping the brand narrative within the broader context of social media activism. The checklist covers these questions:

→ **Consumer Level**: Which forms of online activism are employed by consumers? What viral actions and content drive their engagement? What channels, platforms and visual languages are used to convey their messages?

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Do stakeholders actively participate in activism? How do they contribute or resist? Do partnerships form between stakeholders and activists? How is the case covered by media and what messages are conveyed?

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: What actions does the brand undertake to address the issue or situation? How do they engage with audiences and other stakeholders in their communication? What platforms do they use? What are the content, tone, timing, and visual representation of the response?

→ **4. Outputs**: This phase demonstrates the tangible results and implications of social media efforts and provides the opportunity for practitioners to assess the consequences of their actions. At the consumer level, outputs manifest through awareness, key themes, and overall sentiment among audiences, as proofs

Stakeholders	Brands and Policy
How are stakeholders and media outlets impacted by changing expectations and interactions? What responsibilities do they have in terms of brand associations and reputational risks?	What are the brand narrative and core values? How does the brand interact with their audience on social media? Does the brand engage with social topics? What is the brand's reputation and has it been compromised?
What drives stakeholders to engage with or respond to social media activism? What common goals and values do they share with activists? What concerns and priorities impact their participation in social discourse?	What external pressures influence the brand's approach to activism? How do brand values align with societal expectations? How does brand behavior trigger consumer activism? How do past experiences and consumer reaction inform decision-making processes?
Do stakeholders actively participate in activism? How do they contribute or resist? Do partnerships form between stakeholders and activists? How is the case covered by media and what messages are conveyed?	What actions does the brand undertake to address the issue or situation? How do they engage with audiences and other stakeholders in their communication? What platforms do they use? What are the content, tone, timing, and visual representation of the response?
How do stakeholder actions impact public perception? What changes occur for stakeholders in reputation and brand partnerships? Are activist messages amplified by media? Do any new collaborative initiatives emerge?	What results from brand reactions in terms of updated policies, changed messaging, or crisis management? How is the brand's visibility on social media affected? How are relationships with stakeholders impacted?
How are the effects on stakeholder connections and partnerships in response to the case? How do their attitudes and reputations evolve? Do they integrate social concerns in their narratives and communications?	How do brand perception and storytelling evolve? Which aspects of communication are affected? Are new initiatives launched? Do changes occur at managerial level? Does the brand face any legal consequences?
How are stakeholders financially and legally affected? Do they witness shifts in public support? Are they more cautious in their partnerships? What changes occur in media narratives and discussions about social topics?	What is the impact on brand positioning? Are there shifts in CSR efforts? Are new EDI policies implemented? Are new platforms and themes prioritised? How do visual content and tone change to reflect activist themes?
Are stakeholders adopting more socially responsible practices? Do they share them on social media? Are they more inclined to collaborate with brands that prioritize sustainability and ethical practices?	Does the brand revise its KPIs to integrate social and environmental values into its success models? How does the brand amplify diverse voices and grassroots initiatives? How does it challenge industry standards?

of the effectiveness of their activities. On the other hand, stakeholders and brands assess impact at this stage by analysing public perception and reputation. For brands, it also signifies understanding impact on policies, messaging, and communication strategies. Guiding questions are the following:

→ **Consumer Level**: What changes in visibility and awareness of the issue result from the activism? What metrics describe them? What key themes and narratives emerge from the activism? What is the dominant sentiment?

→ **Stakeholder Level**: How do stakeholder actions impact public perception? What changes occur for stakeholders in reputation and brand partnerships? Are activist messages amplified by media? Do any new collaborative initiatives emerge?

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: What results from brand reactions in terms of updated policies, changed messaging, or crisis management? How is the brand's visibility on social media affected? How are relationships with stakeholders impacted?

Stages 3 and 4 describe the 'Action' aspect, encompassing the tangible online and offline actions that define the activism.

→ **5.** In the **Outcomes** stage, the sustained implications and consequences are explored, evaluating the shifts resulting from previous stages. At the consumer level, the analysis revolves around alterations in behaviour, values, and brand preferences, examining whether activism has translated into tangible, lasting changes in consumer choices. For stakeholders, the impact has to be assessed in terms of connections and partnerships,

but also concerning their attitudes and personal narratives. At the brand level, this represents a key phase, as identifying how perceptions and narratives evolve informs necessary changes in communication and policy. The main aspects investigated are:

→ **Consumer Level**: What changes occur in consumer behaviour, values, and purchasing decisions? Are brand loyalty and perception impacted? Does the case trigger social conversations beyond the fashion sphere?

→ **Stakeholder Level**: How are the effects on stakeholder connections and partnerships in response to the case? How do their attitudes and reputations evolve? Do they integrate social concerns into their narratives and communications?

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: How do brand perception and storytelling evolve? Which aspects of communication are affected? Are new initiatives launched? Do changes occur at the managerial level? Does the brand face any legal consequences?

Stages 3 and 4 describe the 'Action' aspect, encompassing the tangible online and offline actions that define the activism.

→ **6. Impact** represents one of the culminating stages of the model, describing substantial transformations resulting from the process. For consumers, this phase encompasses both behaviour changes of individuals and the ripple effect of activism, which may have inspired subsequent movements. At the stakeholder level, the interaction between stakeholders, media, and the broader social dialogue is the main focus. Concrete financial and legal consequences are also assessed. Finally, for brands this phase inspires a revision of established practices, policies, and positioning, resulting in a shift towards more socially responsible and sustainable fashion communication. This stage is evaluated according to the following parameters:

→ **Consumer Level**: Does the activism inspire behavioural and lifestyle changes? Does it impact other actions or movements? Do narratives surrounding the issue evolve over time? Are consumers engaged with the cause long-term?

→ **Stakeholder Level**: How are stakeholders financially and legally affected? Do they witness shifts in public support? Are they more cautious in their partnerships? What changes occur in media narratives and discussions about social topics?

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: What is the impact on brand positioning? Are there shifts in CSR efforts? Are new EDI policies implemented? Are new platforms and themes prioritised? How do visual content and tone change to reflect activist themes?

The fifth and sixth phases describe the dimension of 'Impact', driven by an evaluation of the long-term consequences of activism efforts.

→ **7.** The **Value** stage is the final step of the Value Chain, embodying the overall social and environmental value generated throughout the entire path. This phase serves as the pivotal point for evaluating how valuable the whole process has been. For consumers, it highlights the educational and cultural influence of activism on their awareness of social issues. It assesses how awareness translates into informed decisions and ethical sensitivity. For stakeholders, the value accentuates the adoption of socially responsible practices, considering whether they assimilate and amplify societal values. Lastly, for brands, it signifies the integration of social and environmental values into the core of their operations, helping to shape industry standards and expectations. The checklist is the following:

→ **Consumer Level**: Are consumers more aware of social issues in fashion? Are they making more informed decisions? Is there a shift in cultural norms and fashion consumption? Does an improvement in status occur for ethical fashion?

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Are stakeholders adopting more socially responsible practices? Do they share them on social media? Are they more inclined to collaborate with brands that prioritize sustainability and ethical practices?

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Does the brand revise its KPIs to integrate social and environmental values into its success models? How does the brand amplify diverse voices and grassroots initiatives? How does it challenge industry standards?

From this description, it emerges how the three levels are interconnected, despite all contributing to social and environmental change with different means and values. Understanding the contribution of each level appears fundamental in building a comprehensive assessment model and effectively informing decision-making. The model allows us to see how change is usually initiated at the consumer level, amplified by stakeholders, and eventually influences brand behaviour, resulting in broader societal and environmental value. It considers the complex interplay between various actors in the fashion communication landscape and their roles in driving change.

This framework serves as a foundational tool for the upcoming section, which covers the practical application of this model in assessing the social impact of digital activism on fashion communication in concrete scenarios.

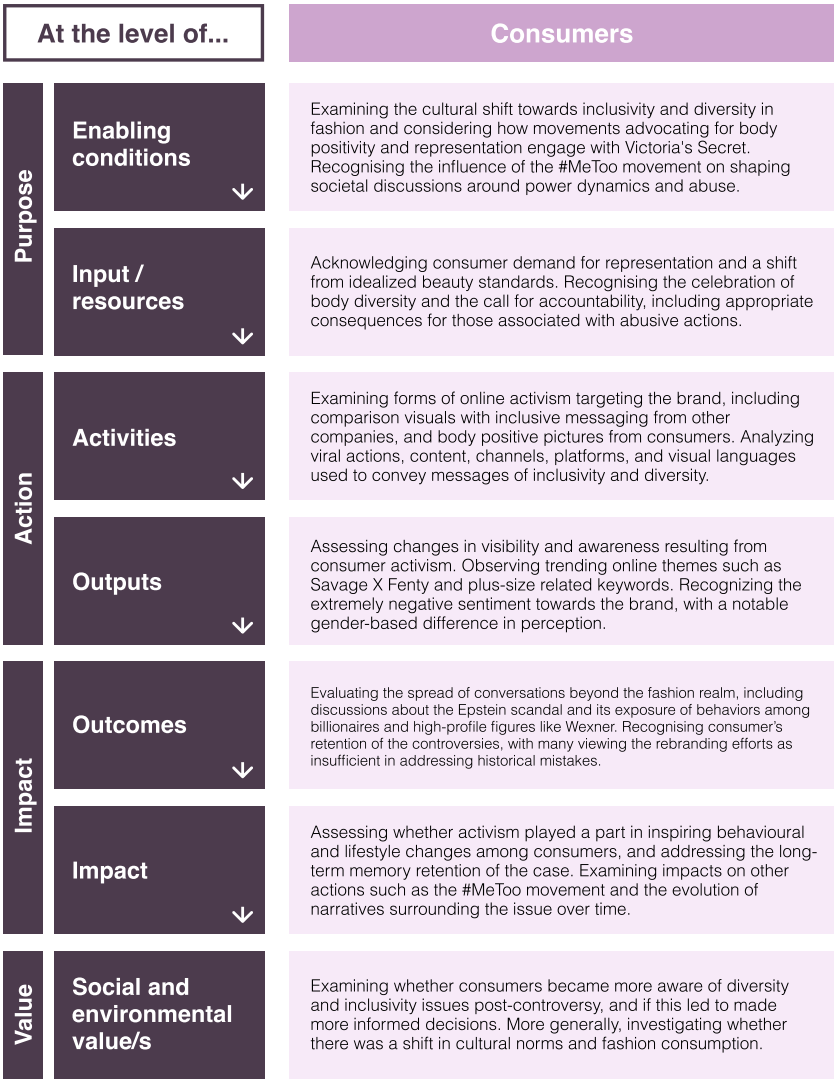
5.5.2 Model Application and Evaluation

Moving on to consider the real-world application of the Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Communication, the framework is here applied to a specific case study within the realm of fashion communication, the activism targeting lingerie and clothing brand Victoria's Secret. The framework's application to the controversy serves as a detailed tool to dissect the multifaceted layers of consumer activism, stakeholder engagement, and brand strategies in response to pressing social and environmental concerns. As presented in Appendix A, this case study covers the challenges faced by Victoria's Secret in navigating accusations of perpetuating unattainable beauty standards, engaging in gender and body discrimination, and dealing with its connection to the Epstein scandal.

As we delve into the application of this framework to the Victoria's Secret controversy (Figure 5.34), a detailed analysis of each stage and the relevant guidelines identified will follow.

In understanding the 'Enabling conditions' of the Victoria's Secret controversy, the analysis focuses on the cultural shift towards inclusivity and diversity in the fashion landscape, with the rise of movements advocating for body positivity and representation in the industry. These acted as catalysts for consumers, prompting them to question and challenge the brand's traditional paradigm, which presented an aspirational lifestyle, portraying aggressively sensual women, often seen from men's perspective. The brand mostly engaged with consumers through traditional media, such as the 'Victoria's Secret Fashion Show', an annual promotional event featuring the iconic faces of the brand known as 'Angels'. The brand's reputation was compromised as it promoted unrealistic beauty standards and endorsed body and gender discrimination, especially against transgender and plus-size individuals. The brand was also engaged in a scandal due to its ties with sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Against this background, this stage of the framework involves considering the prevalent attitudes toward body image, diversity, and inclusivity, as well as the societal discussions around power dynamics and abuse, fostered by the digital landscape and the

→ Figure 5.34
Application of the Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication to the Victoria's Secret controversy case study.



#MeToo movement. It also includes recognising the evolving role of models and their influence on the social discourse.

→ **Consumer Level**: Examining the cultural shift towards inclusivity and diversity in fashion and considering how movements advocating for body positivity and representation engage with Victoria's Secret. Recognising the influence of the #MeToo movement on shaping societal discussions around power dynamics and abuse.

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Assessing the evolving role of models and 'VS Angels' from 'mannequins' to influential social media figures, impacting consumer values. Evaluating the progress in promoting diversity within the fashion and modelling industry, especially with the inclusion of plus-size and transgender models.

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Assessing Victoria's Secret's historical portrayal of an aspirational lifestyle through traditional media, notably the iconic 'VS Fashion Show'. Considering the brand's compromised reputation due to the promotion of unattainable beauty standards, endorsement of body and gender discrimination, and association with the Epstein scandal.

Within this context, the premises for the analysis of the 'Input' are outlined. This stage covers the values and demands that motivate Victoria's Secret consumers to participate in social media activism, including a growing demand for authenticity, a departure from idealized beauty standards, and accountability for those involved in abusive actions. Models, as primary stakeholders and targets of abuse, reflected these sentiments and became advocates for more ethical standards within the fashion industry.

Stakeholders	Brands and Policy
Assessing the evolving role of models and 'VS Angels' from 'mannequins' to influential social media figures, impacting consumer values. Evaluating the progress in promoting diversity within the fashion and modeling industry, especially with the inclusion of plus-size and transgender models.	Assessing Victoria's Secret's historical portrayal of an aspirational lifestyle through traditional media, notably the iconic 'VS Fashion Show'. Considering the brand's compromised reputation due to the promotion of unattainable beauty standards, endorsement of body and gender discrimination, and association with the Epstein scandal.
Recognizing models as primary stakeholders and targets of abuse within the fashion industry and the values and demands they share with activists. Understanding the media's stance and impact on public perception concerning diversity and inclusivity issues.	Analyzing past experiences and decision-making processes which caused brand values to misalign with societal expectations. Assessing what social and communication failures triggered consumer activism.
Considering the Model Alliance petition on sexual misconduct, signed by over 100 models and former 'VS Angels'. Recognizing the impact of models with large followings in driving activism and the crisis that sparked. Considering criticism from competing brands, especially Third Love.	Analyzing actions undertaken by the brand to address the issue. Evaluating engagement with audiences and stakeholders, the choice of platforms, content, tone, timing, and visual representation of the response.
Recognising the shift in stakeholder dynamics as models advocated and initiated activism. Evaluating the resonance of the critique from rival companies, amplifying the need for the brand to adapt its practices.	Examining the results of the brand's shift in messaging towards inclusivity. Acknowledging consumer scepticism, viewing the changes as a strategic move rather than genuine commitment. Considering the inclusion of diverse models, such as transgender model Valentina Sampaio and the body-positive Barbara Palvin.
Evaluating effects on stakeholder attitudes, narratives, partnerships, and connections in response to the case, especially concerning the models who stopped working with the brand. Assessing integration of social concerns into stakeholder narratives and communications.	Evaluating the brand's strategic rebranding, marked by a replacement Angels with the VS Collective, a group of ambassadors advocating for equality. Recognizing shifts in leadership, including Wexner's departure, the formation of a new executive team and the majority female board. Noting the company's independence from parent company L Brands, and the expansion of product lines to include inclusive items like nursing, maternity, and mastectomy bras.
Evaluating financial impacts on stakeholders, shifts in public support, specifically for models and competitors like Savage X Fenty, and changes in media narratives and discussions about social topics.	Examining the redefined brand positioning and assessing the effectiveness of the new messaging and social media strategy in shaping consumer perceptions. Investigating the implementation of new inclusive corporate policies. Analyzing changes in platforms and themes prioritized after the rebranding, including alterations in visual content and tone to align with activist themes and promote inclusivity and diversity.
Considering stakeholders they adopted and promoted more socially responsible practices after the controversy, also in terms of new collaborations with brands that prioritise inclusivity and diversity.	Analyzing whether the brand revised its KPIs to integrate social and environmental values. Assessing whether the brand amplified diverse voices with new initiatives such as the VS Collective, and whether new priorities in decision-making processes emerged with the inclusion of a women-led board.

→ **Consumer Level**: Acknowledging consumer demand for representation and a shift from idealized beauty standards. Recognising the celebration of body diversity and the call for accountability, including appropriate consequences for those associated with abusive actions.

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Recognizing models as primary stakeholders and targets of abuse within the fashion industry and the values and demands they share with activists. Understanding the media's stance and impact on public perception concerning diversity and inclusivity issues.

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Analyzing past experiences and decision-making processes which caused brand values to misalign with societal expectations. Assessing what social and communication failures triggered consumer activism.

These motivations lead to the analysis of the 'Activities' employed by activists to target the brand. Both consumers and stakeholders demanded new codes of conduct, especially concerning the mistreatment of models. Their actions, together with criticism from competing brands, contributed to the intensification of the crisis. Evaluating the actions taken to address social and environmental issues, as well as the brand's strategic responses to these, is fundamental in supporting the integration of more socially responsible practices.

→ **Consumer Level**: Examining forms of online activism targeting the brand, including comparison visuals with inclusive messaging from other companies, and body-positive pictures from consumers. Analyzing viral actions, content, channels, platforms, and visual languages used to convey messages of inclusivity and diversity.

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Considering the Model Alliance petition on sexual misconduct, signed by over 100 models and former 'VS Angels'. Recognizing the impact of models with large followings in driving activism and the crisis that sparked. Considering criticism from competing brands, especially Third Love.

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Analyzing actions undertaken by the brand to address the issue. Evaluating engagement with audiences and stakeholders, the choice of platforms, content, tone, timing, and visual representation of the response.

Transitioning to the 'Outputs' stage, assessing the outputs involves understanding the changes in visibility, trending online themes, and dominant sentiments resulting from consumer activism. In Victoria's Secret case, insights can emerge from analysing the apparent gender-based differences in negative perception towards the brand, as well as from trending discussions about inclusive alternatives and competitors. The widespread negative sentiment further increased due to the resonance of the brand's responses. Stakeholder dynamics also witnessed a transformation as models, once the face of Victoria's Secret, became advocates and initiators of activism.

→ **Consumer Level**: Assessing changes in visibility and awareness resulting from consumer activism. Observing trending online themes such as Savage X Fenty and plus-size related keywords. Recognizing the extremely negative sentiment towards the brand, with a notable gender-based difference in perception.

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Recognising the shift in stakeholder dynamics as models advocated and initiated activism. Evaluating the resonance of the critique from rival companies, amplifying the need for the brand to adapt its practices.

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Examining the results of the brand's shift in messaging towards inclusivity. Acknowledging consumer scepticism, viewing the changes as a strategic move rather than genuine commitment. Considering the inclusion of diverse models, such as transgender model Valentina Sampaio and the body-positive Barbara Palvin.

For 'Outcomes', tracking changes in consumer behaviour, values, and brand loyalty due to activism is essential, also because conversations extend beyond the fashion realm. Discussions delved into the Epstein scandal, exposing behaviours among high-profile figures, reflecting a broader societal impact. At the same time, stakeholder connections and partnerships evolved, particularly concerning models who disassociated from the brand, signifying a notable shift. Despite Victoria's Secret's strategic rebranding and leadership changes, consumer scepticism persisted. Examining these dynamics offers the possibility to reflect on the effectiveness of changes in communication and policy, informing future decisions.

→ **Consumer Level**: Evaluating the spread of conversations beyond the fashion realm, including discussions about the Epstein scandal and its exposure of behaviours among billionaires and high-profile figures like Wexner. Recognising consumers' retention of the controversies, with many viewing the rebranding efforts as insufficient in addressing historical mistakes.

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Evaluating effects on stakeholder attitudes, narratives, partnerships, and connections in response to the case, especially concerning the models who stopped working with the brand. Assessing the integration of social concerns into stakeholder narratives and communications.

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Evaluating the brand's strategic rebranding, marked by a replacement Angels with the VS Collective, a group of ambassadors advocating for equality. Recognizing shifts in leadership, including Wexner's departure, the formation of a new executive team and the majority female board. Noting the company's independence from parent company L Brands, and the expansion of product lines to include inclusive items like nursing, maternity, and mastectomy bras.

Examining the 'Impact' of activism includes addressing consumers' lifestyle changes, the influence over long-term conversations about beauty standards and accountability both on traditional and social media, and other broader transformations. For Victoria's Secret, the consequences of the activism and the rebranding resulted in an altered scenario. Through the implementation of new policies, amplification of diverse voices through initiatives like the Victoria's Secret Collective, and reframing industry standards, it is possible to address a transformative impact on the brand. In response to these changes in the landscape, brands may need to revise practices, policies, and positioning.

→ **Consumer Level**: Assessing whether activism played a part in inspiring behavioural and lifestyle changes among consumers, and addressing the long-term memory retention of the case. Examining impacts on other actions such as the #MeToo movement and the evolution of narratives surrounding the issue over time.

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Evaluating financial impacts on stakeholders, shifts in public support, specifically for models and competitors like Savage X Fenty, and changes in media narratives and discussions about social topics.

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Examining the redefined brand positioning and assessing the effectiveness of the new messaging and social media strategy in shaping consumer perceptions. Investigating the implementation of new inclusive corporate policies. Analyzing changes in platforms and themes prioritized after the rebranding, including alterations in visual content and tone to align with activist themes and promote inclusivity and diversity.

Finally, the 'Value' stage consists of assessing the increased awareness of online audiences post-controversy, reflecting a potential shift in cultural norms and fashion consumption. It also includes tackling the potential adoption and promotion of socially responsible practices by both consumers and stakeholders and the integration of social and environmental values into the brand's core operations.

→ **Consumer Level**: Examining whether consumers became more aware of diversity and inclusivity issues post-controversy, and if this led to more informed decisions. More generally, investigating whether there was a shift in cultural norms and fashion consumption.

→ **Stakeholder Level**: Considering stakeholders they adopted and promoted more socially responsible practices after the controversy, also in terms of new collaborations with brands that prioritise inclusivity and diversity.

→ **Brand and Policy Level**: Analyzing whether the brand revised its KPIs to integrate social and environmental values. Assessing whether the brand amplified diverse voices with new initiatives such as the 'VS Collective', and whether new priorities in decision-making processes emerged with the inclusion of a women-led board.

To sum up, through the lens of this framework, the Victoria's Secret case study serves as a rich example for understanding the dynamics of social and environmental impact in the realm of fashion communication and activism. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between societal shifts, industry dynamics, and strategic operations employed by a fashion giant facing a dynamic landscape. Therefore, this application acquires significance beyond the fashion sphere, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of brand-consumer relationships in the digital age.

The strengths of the model occur in its holistic approach, adaptability, and ability to offer practical guidance. Including different levels and perspectives - consumers, stakeholders, and brands – the framework allows the consideration of the intricate

relationships that shape the fashion industry. At the same time, its structure offers the possibility of adaptation to different real-world scenarios, as demonstrated by the analysis of the Victoria's Secret controversy. Finally, by breaking down the stages into specific questions, the framework acquires a functional value. This is crucial for fashion brands aiming to navigate the evolving landscape of social and environmental responsibility.

These factors demonstrate the model's effectiveness as a self-assessment tool, enabling fashion brands to evaluate their practices and make informed decisions for improvement. This self-analysis is particularly relevant at a time when consumers demand transparency and ethics. Moreover, the framework represents a structured guide to help brands navigate the current context, especially concerning the topics of societal expectations, stakeholder endorsement, and social responsibility. As the fashion industry undergoes further shifts towards sustainability, having a guide for self-assessment becomes beneficial. Given its adaptability, the framework can align with the changing paradigm and the evolving values of consumers and stakeholders, offering guidelines for brands to remain relevant in societal discourse, and to generate social and environmental values.

To provide an actionable self-assessment tool for brands, the conceptual framework developed in this research is translated into an operational form, facilitating its practical application. This is accomplished through the creation of a Miro template (Figure 5.35), which serves as the ultimate self-assessment tool and output of the research. The Miro template is designed to be accessible to fashion brands, providing them with a structured framework for evaluating their communication campaigns and assessing the social impact of their actions. This canvas incorporates key elements of the conceptual framework, offering a user-friendly interface that guides brands through the assessment process. Within the template, brands can input relevant data and information regarding their communication strategies, such as campaign objectives, target audience, messaging, and channels utilized. The template also encourages brands to consider the alignment of their values with those of their audiences and the broader social context. By filling the Miro template with their specific campaign details, brands can evaluate the extent to which their communication efforts effectively address social justice issues and promote positive change within the fashion industry. The template provides a comprehensive assessment of a brand's performance, taking into account factors such as authenticity, inclusivity, transparency, and the amplification of marginalized voices.

Ultimately, the Miro template serves as a practical tool that empowers fashion brands to operationalize the conceptual framework developed in this research. Through this self-assessment process, fashion brands gain valuable insights into their communication strategies and their impact on both their target audience and society at large. It enables brands to identify areas of improvement, recognize opportunities for transformative change, and make informed decisions about future communication campaigns. It allows them to enhance their communication efforts and empower grassroots voices, contributing to positive social and environmental impact within the fashion industry.

→ **Figure 5.35** Miro template of the Social Impact Assessment Model for Fashion Brand Communication.

↘ 6. Conclusions and Future Research

This thesis has examined the impact of social media activism on fashion brand communication, aiming to provide evidence of the transformative and disruptive power of social media activism within the contemporary fashion industry. Specifically, the purpose of the research was to explore the extent to which social media activism influences brand communication strategies, shapes consumer expectations, and encourages a greater emphasis on social and environmental sustainability within fashion. By examining the intersection of social media, activism, and fashion communication, this investigation has addressed the main research questions and drawn significant conclusions.

Throughout the research process, a constructivist paradigm was embraced, acknowledging the socially constructed nature of knowledge. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach, drawing upon disciplines like media and cultural studies, visual communication, fashion sociology, and social innovation, a comprehensive understanding of the research topic was achieved within the broader context of the digital age. The methodology employed in this study, including an inductive phase and a case study approach, provided both a theoretical and an empirical base for the analysis.

The research findings affirm that the rise of social media activism has fundamentally transformed the landscape of fashion brand communication. It has disrupted traditional communication paradigms, reshaped brand storytelling, and urged brands to engage authentically with social issues. Activism efforts have driven a shift in consumer expectations, driving brands to embrace transparency, accountability, and ethical practices. The rise of social media platforms represented a catalyst for advocating social change and amplifying the voices of individuals and communities who were once marginalized. In this context, designers have emerged as critical actors, serving as bridges between brands and their audiences, translating the values and messages of activist movements into tangible initiatives.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and considerations of this research.

Firstly, the model developed in this thesis may oversimplify the intricacy of real-world situations. As widely demonstrated, the fashion industry is a complex system influenced by various factors, and the model may not fully capture all the complexity of brand communication. Moreover, fashion has a dynamic nature, meaning that the model may require regular adjustments to stay relevant and efficient. In particular, future technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, or blockchain, may have significant implications for fashion brand communication and lead to new forms of activism.

Another challenge is related to the limited quantitative metrics. The framework mainly relies on qualitative evaluation, which can represent a limit for brands looking for measurable indicators. Quantitative metrics are crucial for businesses aiming to set precise goals and assess their progress over time.

Lastly, the framework's focus on digital activism and social media may overlook offline dynamics that contribute to social impact. Brands targeting less technology-savvy demographics may encounter difficulties in obtaining reliable data.

In light of these considerations, several suggestions for future work in the field of fashion communication assessment can be outlined.

Future research should focus on making the framework actionable for brands. This involves developing mechanisms that allow brands to translate self-assessment insights into concrete corrective actions for their communication campaigns.

To this end, the inclusion of quantitative metrics that complement the qualitative nature of the model appears fundamental. This consists of identifying measurable indicators and performance benchmarks to offer a more well-rounded evaluation of impacts. Collaborating with experts specialising in key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to social impact assessment will ensure a solid foundation to support the application of the model. Practitioners can indeed provide valuable insights into industry standards and practices, and emerging trends, contributing to the creation of a set of measures relevant to the industry. This collaborative effort will not only enhance the framework's credibility but also encourage a multidisciplinary approach to assessing fashion brand communication's impact, in agreement with the multidisciplinary approach used throughout this study.

Professional advice on emerging trends is also significant given the dynamic nature of fashion, activism, and technology. Focusing on developing frameworks that can adapt to emerging trends, evolving consumer expectations, and new social issues would tackle one of the limitations previously addressed. This would ultimately result in a more tailored and contextually relevant application of the model, acknowledging further shifts in the landscape.

In conclusion, this thesis has laid a foundation for further exploration and practical applications in this rapidly evolving field, ultimately contributing to more ethical, accountable, and socially conscious fashion brand communication. By pursuing these future research directions, scholars and practitioners can further refine our understanding of the impact of social media activism on fashion brand communication. This will contribute to the development of more effective strategies and frameworks for fashion brands to navigate social and environmental responsibility and create a positive impact in the fashion industry.

↘ Appendix A. Case Studies

1. Brandy Melville's Diversity Controversy

Since the early 2010s, Brandy Melville has faced sustained criticism for promoting a singular ideal of beauty, which excluded racial and body diversity. The brand also faced allegations of racially biased hiring decisions and a discriminatory work environment.

→ Background

→ Topic

The brand's one-size-fits-most policy and "Brandy Girls" aesthetic, that emphasises a narrow ideal of beauty through predominantly featuring slim, young, and often blonde models, exclude diverse body types and and lack racial and body diversity. According to the one-size-fits-most policy, clothing is mainly available in a single size or labeled as 'XS' or 'small,' despite the average American woman wearing larger sizes. The brand claims many styles are designed to be baggy or made from stretchy fabrics to accommodate a broader range of sizes. Additionally, racially biased hiring decisions and a discriminatory work environment contribute to these issues.

→ Social Issue

Lack of inclusivity, racism, antisemitism

→ Actors

Brandy Melville, Stephan Marsan (CEO), Kate Taylor (Business Insider Reporter)

→ Geographical and cultural area

Initially concentrated in North America and Western Europe, criticism regarding the issue gradually extended to other regions, including China. The demographics engaged in the activism consist of almost exclusively teenage girls and young women.

→ Storyline

→ Trigger

The activism was triggered by both communication and social failures. Communication failure consisted in the promotion of harmful and unattainable beauty standards, as well as in endorsing body and racial discrimination through offensive messages. Social failure arose from the brand being accused of racism, antisemitism, and sexual misconduct, as well as facing allegations of poor employee treatment and discriminatory hiring practices.

→ Timeline

- **2012-2014.** First instances of criticism against the brand arise, accusing it of perpetuating body dysmorphia due to its exclusive sizing policy and highlighting a lack of diversity. The backlash is led by teens and young girls, with the hashtag "one size fits small" gaining traction on Twitter.

  ↘ **24 Jul 2012.** Youtuber Trisha Paytas shares her body-shaming experience at a Brandy Melville store on YouTube. She takes down the video after receiving a legal letter from Brandy Melville.

  ↘ **4 Sept 2013.** Op-ed by undergraduate student Rini Sampath is published on the Daily Trojan, the University of Southern California's independent student newspaper, discussing issues related to Brandy Melville's sizing policy and representation.

  ↘ **24 May 2014.** High schooler Lani Renaldo publishes an open letter to the brand on the Huffington Post, addressing concerns about the one-size-fits-most policy and lack of inclusivity.

"Please take a look at just a few things: One, the clothes at Brandy are not really one size fits all; and two, all the models look the same, despite the company stating that they look for, "diverse, California girls." That just is not true".

2015-2019. Concerns regarding Brandy Melville's policies and practices persist.

24 May 2020. Former employee @calliejeanxo shares a Tiktok video accusing the brand of racist and discriminatory hiring practices. The video quickly goes viral, accumulating more than 6.1 million views by June 12, 2020. Over the following two weeks, she shares over a dozen related videos on TikTok, providing additional details about her experience with the brand and responding to questions from viewers. The videos are no longer available on the platform.

In her viral TikTok video, Callie claims that her recruitment at Brandy Melville was influenced more by her appearance than her experience. She recalls instances of a manager rejecting a qualified Asian applicant based on her race, and highlights that the majority of her co-workers were white and skinny, with the sole exception a larger employee assigned to work behind the cash register.

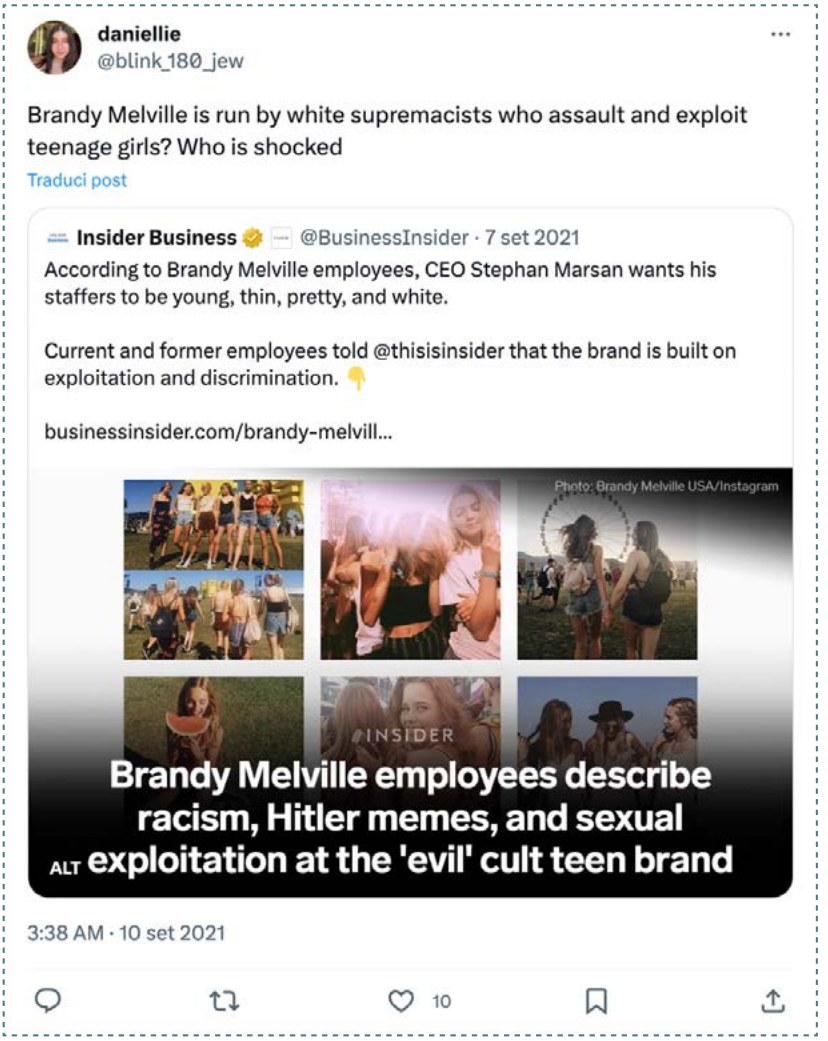
2020. The brand faces two lawsuits, with former higher-ups of the company citing contract breaches and a culture of discrimination.

↘ **May 2020.** Former senior vice president Luca Rotondo alleges that he was asked "multiple times" by his superiors to "fire female employees based on their physical appearance." However, the case is later dismissed.

↘ **August 2020.** Franco Sorgi and Paolo Simeone, former heads of Brandy Melville Canada, file a lawsuit claiming that Yvan Marsan, representing Bastiat USA Inc., the brand's manufacturer, instructed them to hire "attractive white girls" and closed a store due to customers perceived as "ghetto", referring to African Americans. ↘ **June 2022.** Sorgi and Simeone win the lawsuit against the company, resulting in Brandy Melville being ordered to pay $806,000 in damages and other associated costs.

2020 - 2021. Brandy Melville, referred to as BM, gains popularity in China, sparking a debate on societal beauty standards. The idealisation of thin bodies in Chinese culture played a role in the diffusion of "BM style" and led to the promotion of an unattainable weight standard. This phenomenon was popularised by the hashtag #TestIfYouCanRockTheBMStyle and an image depicting the "BM Girls' Ideal Weight Chart", both of which went viral on social media platforms Weibo and Little Red Book. Among Chinese Gen Z, some embraced this aesthetic as a fashion statement, while others condemned it as a form of body shaming.

Hashtag	Views on Weibo
#Brandy Melville	68.19 million
#BM	37.44 million
#Test if you fit BM style	34.25 million
#BMgirl	18.48 million
#BM weight standard chart	10.02 million



7 Sept 2021. A Business Insider report by Kate Taylor exposed disturbing allegations of discrimination and sexual exploitation within Brandy Melville. Through interviews with former employees and access to confidential documents and internal communications, Taylor revealed instances of discrimination in hiring and employment, along with allegations of sexual harassment. The report also exposed content from a group chat called "Brandy Melville gags," where Stephan Marsan and other executives shared racist and antisemitic humor, as well as pornographic material. Kate Taylor's investigative work brought these systemic issues within the brand to public attention, sparking controversy on social media. Within hours of the article's publication, Pacsun, the exclusive Brandy Melville wholesaler in the US, announced they were re-evaluating their relationship with the brand in light of the serious allegations.

28 Dec 2022. Brandy Melville reaches a settlement in a lawsuit related to the failure to properly pay employees. The company agrees to pay $1.45 million to nearly 4,000 employees who had worked from October 12, 2012, to July 4, 2021.

↘ **Jan 2016.** Maria Allen and Maurice Brown had filed a lawsuit against Brandy Melville, accusing the brand of violating labor codes.

↘ **Oct 2016.** Katrina Lanni had filed a similar lawsuit, claiming inadequate compensation for hours worked.

→ Social Media Action Characteristics

→ Category of Activism
Sustained criticism

→ Approach
Bottom-up

→ Main platforms
Twitter, Youtube, Tiktok, with a focus on the latter two due to their video-centric nature. These platforms, known for their young user base and trend-driven content, align with Brandy Melville's target demographic. TikTok, especially, encourages authenticity and personal storytelling, amplifying the impact of the controversy within the online community.

→ Forms of online activism
Personal Storytelling: Former employees share insights into Brandy Melville's internal practices, policies, and work culture through video testimonials on platforms like YouTube, employing formats like "Why I quit working at Brandy Melville."

WHY I QUIT WORKING AT BRANDY MELVILLE | STORYTIME

248.247 visualizzazioni • 4 anni fa

Viral memes / Parody content: TikTok features viral memes, especially focusing on the tiny entrance doors in Brandy Melville stores. The "skinny door" in Paris becomes symbolic of the brand's size exclusivity, often paired with audio from model Bella Hadid, creating a satirical commentary.

Content Challenges/Social Experiments: The "Trying Brandy Melville as a Size Medium/Large" video trend on YouTube and TikTok involves medium or plus-size users showcasing the brand's limited sizing options, providing a visual demonstration of the challenges faced under the one-size-fits-most policy.

Brand Critique and Awareness: Video commentaries across platforms aim to inform viewers about specific issues and controversies associated with Brandy Melville, contributing to brand critique and raising awareness about the concerns.

Calls for Boycotts: Users across social media platforms, particularly Twitter and TikTok, call for boycotts in response to the controversies.

Viral Slogans: Memorable slogans such as "one size fits small" and "one size does not fit all" gain traction, becoming viral expressions of dissatisfaction with the brand's sizing policies and promoting awareness of the controversies.

→ Visual languages
Video formats, particularly on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, allow for visual storytelling, making it well-suited for discussing fashion-related controversies and showcasing issues like sizing policies, providing an engaging medium for discussion.

Comparison visuals are frequently employed in sizing comparison videos to promote positive body image, encouraging viewers to embrace diverse body types.

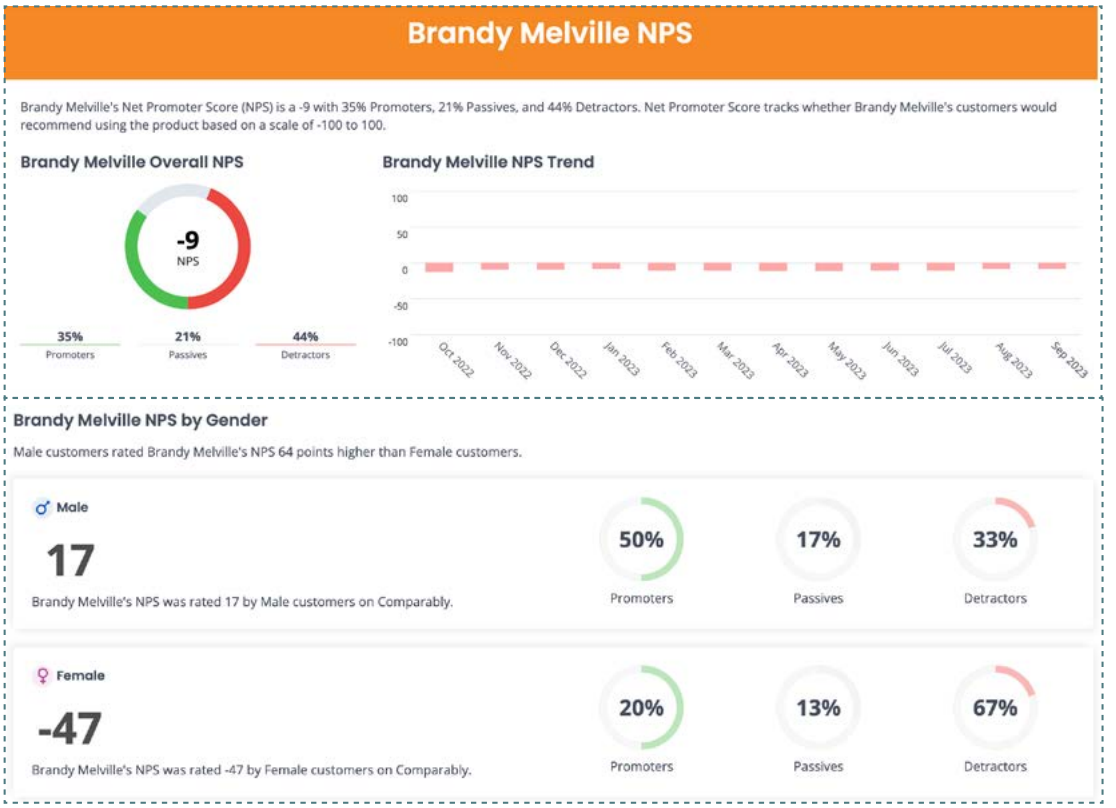
Verbal commentary, through narration or on-screen text fosters community engagement by inviting viewers to share their thoughts and experiences in the comments section. The intimate and personal tone creates authenticity, generating a strong emotional connection between the audience and the discussed topics, leading to deeper advocacy efforts.

Satirical content and memes. Gen Z, known for cultural sensitivity and social consciousness, uses humor as a communication tool to address serious issues. This approach aligns with Gen Z's online culture, ensuring relatability and reflecting the communication style of a generation raised in the internet age.

→ Case perception

→ Sentiment on social media

The public response to Brandy Melville is marked by widespread criticism, especially among women. In China, the "BM style" has been labeled an "anxiety creator," reflecting concerns about societal beauty standards. A lack of surprise towards the controversies is also often expressed, indicating that issues related to the brand's policies were already under discussion before specific allegations gained attention. Notably, the brand's silence has fueled further criticism on social media.



→ Memory retention

The Brandy Melville controversy has left a lasting impression, with ongoing criticism and active conversations on social media. The brand's lack of response or accountability has kept consumers engaged in continuous activism against the brand.

→ Keywords trends

Sizing, employee treatment, exclusivity, silence, discrimination, lack of representation, fatphobia, BM measurements.

→ Traditional media coverage

Traditional media coverage of the Brandy Melville controversies has been mixed, with attention initially centered on the one-size-fits-most policy and discriminatory practices within the company. As lawsuits emerged, the focus shifted to legal developments and financial implications. However, compared to social media activism, traditional media scrutiny has been relatively limited, influenced by several factors.

1. Target Audience: Gen Z, the primary audience engaged in this controversy, is more active on social media, relying on these platforms as their main sources of information. Traditional media may not capture their attention as effectively.
2. Forms of Activism: Activism around Brandy Melville has taken the form of humor and personal storytelling, making it highly relatable and shareable on social media. These platforms offer higher levels of interactivity compared to traditional media.
Brandy Melville's Lack of a Public Face:
3. Media outlets faced challenges in accessing company representatives for interviews, comments, and responses. The brand's lack of a public face limits opportunities for traditional media engagement.
4. Sustained Criticism vs. Viral Firestorms: The sustained and constant criticism surrounding Brandy Melville contrasts with viral firestorms that might attract immediate attention from traditional media. The prolonged nature of the controversy may make it less appealing for traditional outlets seeking breaking news.
Overall, the nature of social media activism, coupled with the unique characteristics of the brand and its target audience, has contributed to a more significant impact and visibility on these platforms compared to traditional media channels.

→ Impact on brand communication
→ Short-term impact and brand reaction

2014. Jessie Longo, executive at Brandy Melville, makes a statement on the lack of size inclusivity in a now-offline interview with USA Today.

"We offer such a variety of clothing. I would love for everybody to shop at Brandy...We can satisfy almost everybody, but not everybody. The one size fits most clothing might turn-off somebody if they don't walk into the store, but if you walk in you'll find something even if it's a bag." Jessie Longo.

"It's actually not one size fits all it's just one size, which is a big conception." Aprille Balsom

2015. Aprille Balsom, Brandy Melville's social media manager, makes a statement on the lack of size inclusivity in an interview with Novella Magazine.

↘ Not only has Brandy Melville not modified its sizing, the brand appears to be banking on such backlash. As Bloomberg's Lisa Marsh noted in connection with Brandy Melville's success, "The brand has cultivated an aura of exclusivity, in part because of the limited sizing. Teens who are into the brand like the idea that the clothing isn't for everyone." The Fashion Law

↘ This is a rare case of a brand escaping cancel culture. "Given the nature of the allegations levelled at Brandy Melville, it is striking that, in an era of cancel culture, the brand appears to have survived relatively unscathed; its tween and teen customers, usually so socially aware, still queuing up to buy into the brand. With no response from Brandy Melville, its executives, or the lawyers who represent them, a Telegraph reporter went to Mr Marsan's home in New York. But there's an issue: a locked, three-foot high gate prevents anyone from approaching the building. Brandy Melville has no public face, and its deliberate opacity appears to be the perfect smokescreen for a lack of accountability that few brands these days can get away with." Laura Craik and Janet Eastham.

2021. Brandy Melville changes its sizing, labelling most items as XS-S and some as "oversized" instead of "one-size". Some bottoms go up to a size M. However, criticism continues as the brand maintains its limited size options. Former customers express discontent on TikTok, emphasizing dissatisfaction with the introduction of larger-sized items rather than an expansion of the overall size range. The brand's actions are perceived as insincere, facing challenges in meeting consumer expectations. Ongoing monitoring and discussions on social media reflect the persistent scrutiny tied to the brand's historical sizing controversies.

→ Consistency in brand storytelling

Brandy Melville's core identity and market positioning has remained unchanged despite the controversies, showcasing a consistent PR strategy characterised by no traditional advertising, a focal point on social media, and a tendency to respond silently to controversies. Since the brand does not use traditional advertising and primarily relies on social platforms for its storytelling, this section aligns with the analysis carried out in the following section.

→ Changes in social media communication

Brandy Melville maintains a consistent brand image characterized by an aura of exclusivity and desirability. The target audience remains consistent with a focus on a youthful demographic. The brand upholds a signature aesthetic and visual language both in-store and online, featuring candid moments and lifestyle pictures that promote a specific and exclusive lifestyle. This aesthetic aligns with trends in the influencer scene, adapting to shifts such as the move from California to New York in 2021.

While traditionally relying on photography, Brandy Melville recently embraced video content featuring girls singing. This departure from the brand's usual content sparked confusion and discussions on social media.

An analysis of Brandy Melville's Instagram posts in April 2019 revealed several patterns. Racial representation showed that 95% were white, with non-white representations accounting for only 5%. The study also highlighted the representation of body size, indicating that all portrayed Brandy Girls had sizes below average.

2014

2023

2. Who Made My Clothes?

Triggered by the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, the campaign aimed to raise awareness about the working conditions and transparency issues within the fashion industry. It encouraged consumers to question brands about their supply chains and demand greater accountability.

→ Background

→ Topic

The "Who Made My Clothes?" campaign by the Fashion Revolution movement, which aims to bring transparency and ethical practices to the fashion industry.

→ Social Issue

Transparency across the fashion supply chain.

→ Actors

Carry Somers and Orsola De Castro, founders of the Fashion Revolution movement.

→ Geographical and cultural area

The "Who Made My Clothes?" campaign, led by Fashion Revolution, is a global movement with teams in over 100 countries. It specifically highlights and focuses on issues related to the fashion industry in developing countries.

→ Storyline

→ Trigger

The trigger for the "Who Made My Clothes?" campaign was the 2013 Rana Plaza factory disaster. This social failure prompted the movement to raise awareness about human and environmental exploitation within the fashion industry.

→ Timeline

24 Apr 2013. The Rana Plaza, a garment factory producing items for various fashion brands, collapses, resulting in a tragic incident. 1,134 people lose their lives, and approximately 2,500 people are injured.

↘ **27 Apr 2013.** Violent protests by garment workers emerge in Dhaka following the collapse of Rana Plaza.

↘ **15 May 2013.** The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh is signed. This agreement aims to address safety issues in the garment industry in Bangladesh, particularly focusing on fire and building safety standards to prevent such tragedies in the future.

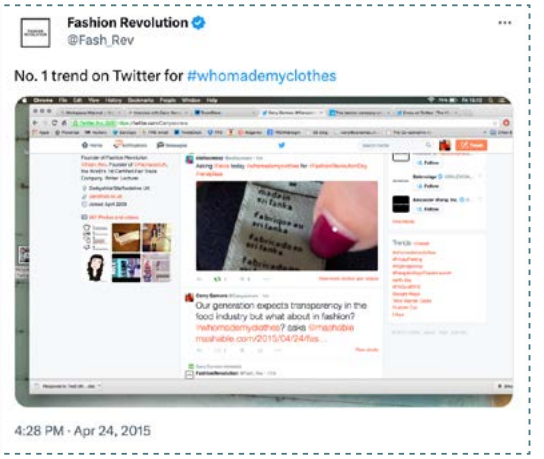
1 Jun 2013. Orsola de Castro and Carry Somers found Fashion Revolution and start the #WhoMadeMyClothes campaign via Twitter.

24 Apr 2014. The anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster marks the first Fashion Revolution Day. People commemorate the event by using hashtags such as #insideout and #whomademyclothes. The hashtag #insideout became the number one global trend on Twitter, reflecting widespread engagement and awareness regarding the need for transparency and ethical practices in the fashion industry.
"24th April 2014 will mark one year since the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh, which killed 1133 people and affected many more. Fashion Revolution Day encourages people to ask: "Who Made Your Clothes?" – a global demand to make fashion more transparent and ensure our clothes carry a story we can all be proud of. Join us, and thousands around the world, to mark Fashion Revolution Day and echo the call to turn fashion #InsideOut."

24 Apr 2015. During Fashion Revolution day, 42,000 social media users ask the question #whomademyclothes, with a remarkable 124 million impressions of Fashion Revolution hashtags throughout the month of April. Again, the hashtag claimed the top spot as the number one global trend on Twitter.

↘ **2015.** Fashion Revolution's first media outreach was ignited in Berlin in 2015 when Fashion Revolution posted experiment “T-shirts for 2 Euros" on Youtube. The video was the catalyst for the #WhoMadeOurClothes movement.

Since its founding, Fashion Revolution has grown in scale and ambition. The movement has expanded beyond its initial focus on consumer awareness, and now works to promote systemic change within the fashion industry. The organisation has developed a range of initiatives and campaigns aimed at promoting sustainability and ethical practices in the industry.



→ Social Media Action Characteristics

→ Category of Activism
Awareness-raising

→ Approach
Top-down

→ Main platforms
Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and offline platforms.

→ Forms of online activism
Hashtag Campaigns: Hashtags serve as powerful tools for collective awareness and demand, urging brands to be transparent about their supply chains and promote ethical practices. Relevant ones include #whomademyclothes, #whomademyfabrics, #whatsinmyclothes, #lovedclotheslast, #goodclothesfairpay.

Viral Challenges: Participating in the #insideout challenge on Twitter and Instagram, users post selfies while wearing their clothes inside out and backwards to reveal the country of origin label, fostering a sense of accountability. Another viral challenge, #haulternative challenges the culture of constant consumerism, urging individuals to showcase updated items from their wardrobe instead of buying new ones, promoting sustainability.

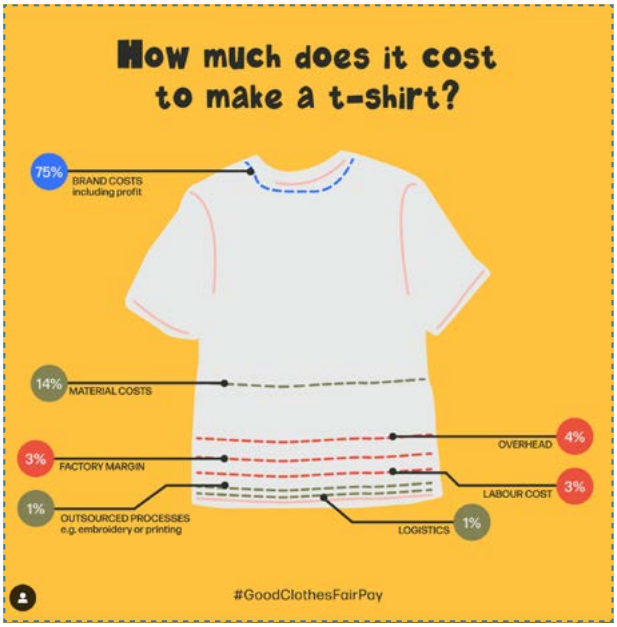
Personal Storytelling: Activism includes inspiring stories from workers, former child laborers, and small sustainable brand owners. Personal narratives humanise the impact of the fashion industry, creating empathy and advocating for fair treatment, ethical practices, and sustainability.

Digital Events: Online events provide platforms for discussions, presentations, and collaborations, fostering a sense of community and collective action.

Online Petitions.

Firestorms via Email: email campaigns are employed to demand transparency from brands, amplifying the call for transparency and ethical practices via direct communication with brands.


GOOD CLOTHES
FAIR PAY
SIGN
NOW
goodclothesfairpay.eu



→ Visual languages

Fashion Revolution's visual language is characterized by simplicity, boldness, and clarity. The visuals are designed to be easily understood and highly shareable on social media platforms. Additionally, the movement places great attention on branding, providing users with social media templates and assets for consistent and cohesive communication.

Hashtags and direct questions: The hashtag's syntactic structure as a question encourages interactive and personal engagement. It fosters a sense of participatory efficacy, emphasizing the collective action for sustainable fashion and highlighting the human labor involved.

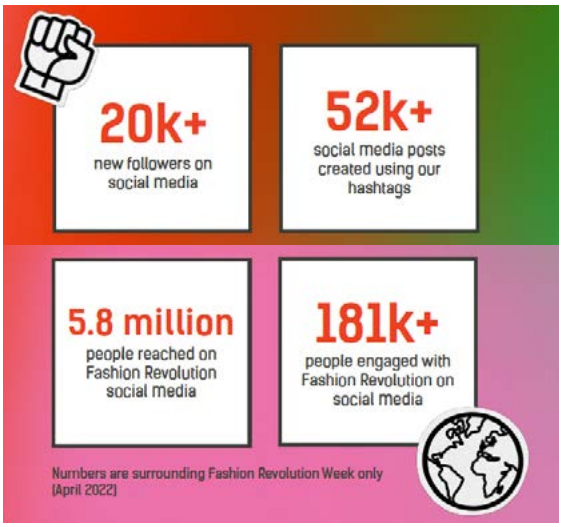
Infographics and Informative Content: Visual aids like infographics convey complex information in a simple and digestible format, promoting understanding and awareness.

Educational Videos: Videos are an engaging way to convey information, allowing for a deeper understanding of the issues in the fashion industry and encouraging advocacy for social and environmental conditions.

Memes: Memes add a touch of humor and relatability to the campaign, making it more shareable and accessible to a wide audience.

→ Reach and engagement

"On social media, we have already built a large, growing and engaged audience. The #whomademyclothes hashtag campaign has proven hugely popular. On Fashion Revolution Day 2014 and 2015, the hashtag trended at number one on Twitter globally. In April 2015 alone the #whomademyclothes was used by 64 million people on Twitter and Instagram reaching 124 million impressions in total. The overall estimated online media reach was 16.5 billion - that is how many times content about Fashion Revolution was seen during April 2015."



→ Case perception

→ Sentiment on social media

The sentiment surrounding Fashion Revolution on social media is predominantly positive, reflecting a global commitment to sustainable and ethical practices in the fashion industry. Users express support, advocate for change, share educational content, and engage in positive community interactions. Positive sentiment is amplified during key events like Fashion Revolution Week, where people worldwide actively engage in campaigns and discussions.

→ Memory retention

The movement has continuously risen through the years, with a longlasting impact on the audience and the fashion industry overall. The movement, fueled by continuous social media engagement, retains a lasting presence in the public's consciousness, actively shaping discussions and actions.

→ Keywords trends

#whomademyclothes, sustainability, transparency, slow fashion, fair trade, fashion revolution week, textile industry

→ Traditional media coverage

Fashion Revolution has received consistent support from traditional media, especially fashion magazines, since its start. These publications have covered and endorsed the movement, highlighting its emphasis on transparency, sustainability, and ethical practices in the fashion industry. The support from fashion magazines underscores the growing importance of ethical considerations in the industry and contributes to the ongoing dialogue initiated by Fashion Revolution.

→ Case-specific observations

Skepticism over performative activism: Some express skepticism about the effectiveness of the movement, raising concerns about the potential for greenwashing and slacktivism. There's a perception that some actions may be more symbolic than impactful. This skepticism includes concerns about greenwashing, where brands present an environmentally friendly image without making significant changes, and doubts about the real impact of social media campaigns, sometimes labeled as slacktivism. These discussions highlight ongoing debates about the authenticity and tangible impact of sustainability efforts within the fashion industry.

Criticism over the spread of inaccurate information: Fashion Revolution's methodology, particularly in the context of the Fashion Revolution Index, has been criticised. The criticism centers on the index assessing a brand's communication policies rather than its broader social and environmental responsibilities.

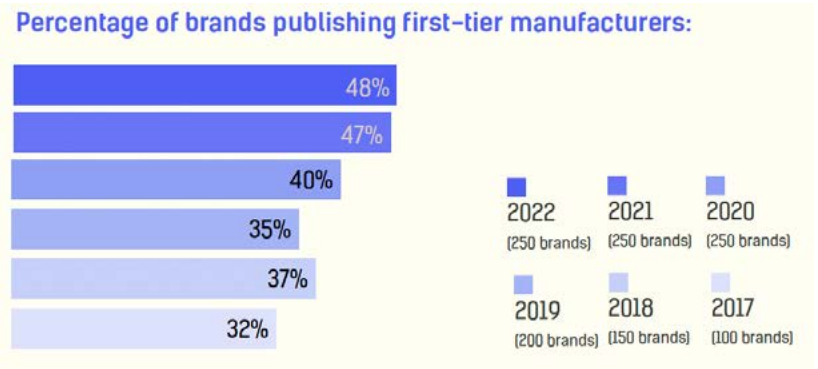
↘ Orsola de Castro, co-founder of Fashion Revolution, has responded to the criticism, highlighting that one of the primary goals of the index is to measure a brand's communication regarding its supply chain. This response underscores the industry's responsibility to educate consumers about supply chain practices.

"When there is a big shift there will always be question marks, there wouldn't be a movement if things were clear. It's a work in progress and it requires spontaneous navigation; three years ago before the Rana Plaza disaster, the words supply chain were not even understood, while now people are talking about supply chains at the supermarket."

→ Impact on brand communication

→ Short-term impact and brand reaction

Fashion Revolution has pushed mainstream fashion brands to enhance labor practices and embrace transparency in their supply chains. The movement's advocacy has prompted major brands to launch sustainability initiatives and disclose more information about their supply chains.



DECENT WORK

- 41% — of brands disclose their approach to recruitment fees in the supply chain
- 6% — of brands disclose the number of workers in the supply chain affected by the payment of recruitment fees or related costs
- 23% — of brands disclose data on the prevalence of modern slavery related violations and risk factors

GENDER & RACIAL EQUALITY

- 36% — of brands disclose gender pay gap in their own operations
- 4% — of brands disclose ethnicity pay gap data in their own operations
- 7% — of brands publish actions focusing on the promotion of racial and ethnic equality in supplier facilities

PURCHASING PRACTICES & LIVING WAGES

- 5% — of brands disclose a method for ring-fencing labour costs in price negotiations
- 2% — of brands disclose the number of orders where labour costs were ring-fenced
- 28% — of brands publish approach to living wages for supply chain workers
- 1% — of brands disclose the number of supply chain workers that are being paid a living wage

↘ For instance, the emergence of the hashtag #imadeyourclothes as a response to #whomademyclothes showcased a significant shift. This hashtag not only emphasized the faces behind the fashion industry but also shed light on the challenging working conditions of many workers. Introduced in 2016, #imadeyourclothes quickly spread, reaching 3,500 voices within its first year.

↘ In terms of legislative impact, Fashion Revolution played a role in the passage of the UK Modern Slavery Act in 2015. This legislation required large brands to detail their efforts in combatting modern slavery within their supply chains. Although the Act lacked a central registry for accountability, Fashion Revolution, in collaboration with Traidcraft, mobilized public support in 2019. This led to a commitment from the UK government to establish an online registry showcasing companies compliant with the law.

↘ Fashion Revolution's annual "Impact Report" and "Fashion Transparency Index" since 2016 have been significant in evaluating major fashion brands' transparency and disclosure practices. This index, by assessing and publicizing brands' transparency levels, has exerted pressure on them to enhance accountability. Consequently, it has catalysed positive changes within the industry, prompting brands to take concrete steps to improve their practices.

3. Gucci Blackface Controversy

Gucci faced a major scandal when a sweater that resembled blackface imagery was released as part of the brand's Fall 2018 Ready-to-Wear fashion show. The incident sparked outrage and led to widespread criticism of the brand for insensitivity and cultural appropriation.

→ Background

→ Topic

Gucci FW 2018 RTW collection featured culturally insensitive products, including a black turtleneck sweater resembling blackface

→ Social Issue

Cultural offense

→ Actors

Marco Bizzarri (CEO), Alessandro Michele (Creative Director)

→ Geographical and cultural area

USA (African-American community)

→ Storyline

→ Trigger

The brand experienced a communication failure due to a lack of diversity in its predominantly Italian creative team. This resulted in a limited understanding of African American culture, impacting the brand's ability to connect with and represent its diverse audience effectively. The incident underscores the importance of diverse perspectives in creative teams for inclusive and culturally relevant communication.

Blackface, born in the US in the XIX century, involved using makeup to caricature black individuals. Over time, it "spread stereotypes of racist images, attitudes and perceptions worldwide" and "became a symbol of the misrepresentation of the African-American community in entertainment and a symbol of cultural offense that shaped the perceptions and prejudices about black people in the US". (Sádaba et al. 2020)

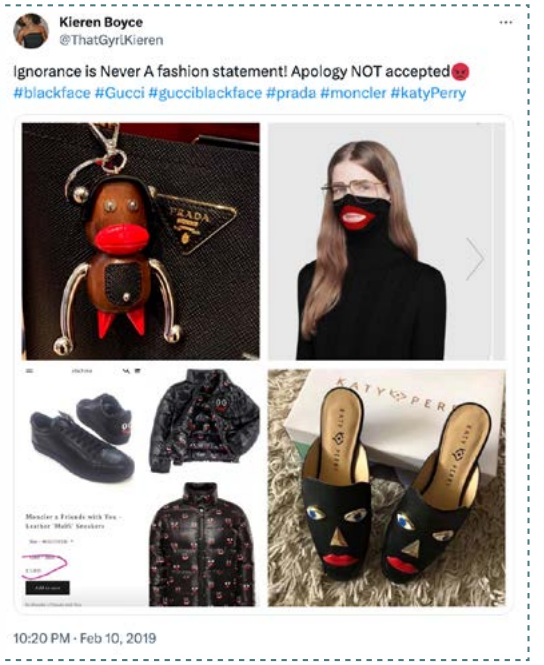
→ Timeline

- **21 Feb 2018.** Gucci presents its FW 18 RTW collection, featuring a wide range of cultural influences representing how people construct their identities through fashion, tech, and social media.

Vogue journalist Sarah Mower described the runway as "a procession of transhumans, [...]: bolted together from the clothing of many cultures, they were Alessandro Michele's metaphor for how people today construct their identities. [...] The show radiated cross-cultural meanings, a clashing of symbols". She defined it as "boundary-pushing", "sensational - in a disturbing and creepy way".

↘ At first, no blackface resemblance is called out by the public nor by critics. However, the brand is criticised for cultural appropriation over the inclusion of a headscarf, sacred in Sikh culture (dastār) and misused as a fashion accessory. The turban had been exclusively worn by white models in the show.

6 Feb 2019. Gucci is called out for a turtleneck sweater that appears to mimic blackface: the top covers the face and has a mouth opening with red lips surrounding it. Controversy first sparks with a Tweet by fashion archivist @evilrashida, who regards the item as particularly offensive since it appeared during Black History Month.



→ Social Media Action Characteristics

→ Category of Activism
Backlash

→ Approach
Bottom-up

→ Main platforms
Twitter, Instagram.

→ Forms of online activism
Boycotts and Consumer Actions: Consumers engaged in boycotts, refusing to purchase Gucci products as a protest against the controversial design. Notable figures, such as 50 Cent, publicly burned Gucci clothing, turning personal actions into powerful statements and further influencing public sentiment.

Community-Building and Collective Discussion: Marginalized voices, particularly within the African-American community, used the controversy as a catalyst for community-building and collective discussions. Online platforms provided spaces for individuals to share their perspectives, experiences, and concerns related to racial insensitivity in the fashion industry.

Advocacy for Industry-Wide Change: Activists advocated for broader changes within the fashion industry to address systemic issues related to cultural insensitivity and racial awareness. Calls were made for increased diversity and cultural competence in design teams and decision-making processes.

Hashtag Campaigns: Hashtags such as #GucciBoycott and #GucciBlackface became central to the online activism campaign. These hashtags were used to aggregate conversations, unite individuals in their protest, and amplify the reach of the movement across social media platforms.

Twitter Storms: Twitter storms involved a coordinated effort to flood the platform with tweets related to the controversy, ensuring that the issue remained in the public eye and putting pressure on the brand to address concerns.

→ Visual languages

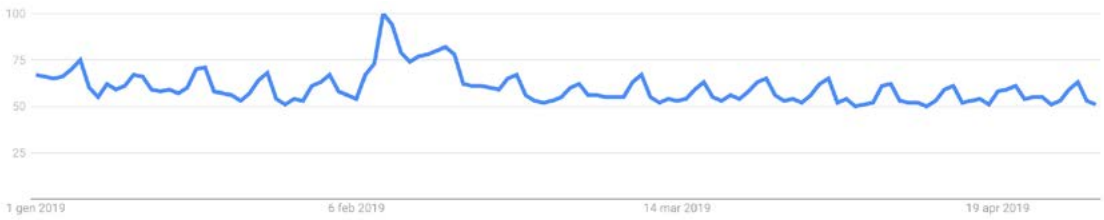
The use of visual comparisons served as a powerful tool in shaping the narrative around the Gucci Blackface controversy. By drawing parallels with both recent and historical cases, activists amplified the visual impact of their message, fostering a deeper understanding of the issue and intensifying calls for accountability and change within the fashion industry.

Comparison Visuals - Recent Cases: Activists used comparison visuals to highlight similar instances of blackface by other fashion brands such as Prada, Moncler, and Katy Perry merchandising. This approach aimed to draw attention to a pattern of insensitivity within the industry, emphasising that the Gucci incident was not an isolated occurrence.

Comparison Visuals - Historical Blackface Imagery: Juxtaposed images featuring the Gucci sweater alongside historical instances of blackface were created to underline the offensive nature of the design. These visuals aimed to provide historical context and emphasize the harmful impact of perpetuating racial stereotypes.

→ Reach and engagement

Using Google Trends data for the keyword "Gucci" worldwide from January 1, 2019, to April 30, 2019, there was a notable peak in interest corresponding to the period when the controversy surrounding the brand emerged. This increase in online searches indicates a heightened level of public attention and engagement during the specific timeframe of the controversy. The peak in interest aligns with the timing of the controversy, suggesting that the incident significantly captured the public's attention and led to increased online discussions, searches, and engagement related to the brand. Such trends highlight the impact of controversies on brand visibility and the extent to which they resonate with a global audience.



→ Case perception

→ Sentiment on social media

The sentiment surrounding the Gucci controversy on social media was characterized by a mix of reactions, with variations across platforms:

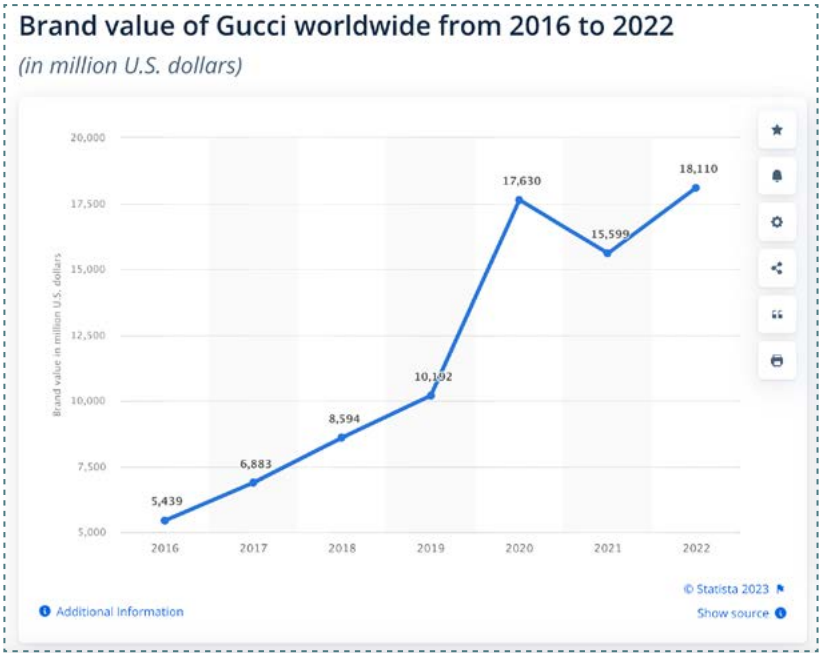
Instagram saw a significant amount of dialogue and educational content related to the controversy. Users engaged in discussions, sharing insights, and raising awareness about the issue. Some Instagram users expressed appreciation for the brand's prompt reaction to the controversy. Positive sentiments were directed towards any visible efforts made by Gucci to address the situation.

Twitter exhibited a higher concentration of criticism and anger. Users on this platform were more vocal in expressing their discontent, with strong critiques and calls for boycotting the brand. Also, skepticism towards the brand's commitment to addressing the issue was prevalent on Twitter.

Reactions evolved over time, with an overall shift towards more positive sentiments as Gucci responded to the controversy. The brand's actions, statements, and any visible steps taken to address concerns likely influenced the sentiment on social media, highlighting the dynamic nature of public perception during such incidents.

→ Memory retention

In the short term, the controversy garnered significant media coverage, triggered consumer reactions, and necessitated immediate crisis management. The incident captured public attention and sparked discussions across various channels. On the other hand, the long-term memory of the controversy is characterized by sustained efforts by Gucci to address issues of cultural sensitivity and diversity. The brand's commitment to implementing corrective measures and promoting inclusivity became a notable aspect of its narrative after the controversy. Gucci's quick response and subsequent actions played a crucial role in influencing public perception: the brand's efforts in crisis management and commitment to cultural awareness contributed to the overall memory of the incident. As a result, the effective handling of the crisis by Gucci resulted in a gradual fading of the memory over time. The brand's proactive approach in addressing the controversy and implementing corrective measures likely contributed to a more positive long-term perception.



→ Keywords trends

blackface, boycott, racism, controversy, prada blackface

→ Traditional media coverage

The Gucci controversy gained international media attention, with media outlets placing it within a broader industry trend and drawing parallels to instances of racial insensitivity in fashion. Coverage discussed the cultural context, contributing to wider conversations on race and diversity in the industry. The narrative often shifted from the initial backlash to an examination of Gucci's response. Media outlets analyzed the brand's long-term implications, initiatives, and commitment to correct the situation. The coverage extended beyond immediate reactions, offering insights into the brand's cultural sensitivity efforts and generating discussions on the fashion industry's responsibilities.

→ Case-specific observations

Larger Context in the Fashion Industry: The Gucci incident was situated within a larger discussion on cultural insensitivity, highlighting systemic issues within the fashion sector. This context urged the need for industry-wide reflection and change. During the online backlash, the Gucci case was frequently linked with recent controversies involving blackface by other fashion brands, including Moncler, Prada, and Katy Perry shoes. This connection emphasized a pattern of racial insensitivity within the industry.

Parallel Political Crisis in Virginia, USA: Concurrently, Virginia faced a political crisis as Governor Ralph Northam encountered backlash for a yearbook photo depicting blackface. The proximity of these events led to comparisons between the Gucci controversy and the political situation in Virginia. Memes and satirical content were used to draw comparisons between the Gucci controversy and Governor Northam's situation. This form of expression allowed for commentary on the broader societal implications of racial insensitivity.

→ Impact on brand communication
→ Short-term impact and brand reaction

- **7 Feb 2019.** Gucci took quick actions to address the situation, issuing an apology and immediately withdrawing the controversial product from online and physical stores.

  ↘ Gucci's rapid apology and product withdrawal aimed to convey a sense of accountability and responsiveness. These actions were significant in shaping the narrative surrounding the controversy and represented the initial stages of the brand's crisis management strategy.

- **10 Feb 2019.** Marco Bizzarri (CEO) agrees to discuss the issue with Dapper Dan, Gucci collaborator and African American fashion designer from Harlem, New York.

- **11 Feb 2019.** Bizzarri sendt an internal memo to address the situation. He admitted the mistake in the balaclava jumper, citing cultural ignorance. He highlighted Gucci's commitment to diversity, self-expression, and inclusivity through various initiatives. Bizzarri pledged immediate actions, including a global cultural awareness program and scholarships, aiming for a stronger, more diverse organization. He affirmed the centrality of people and ongoing dialogue for constructive change while maintaining core values.

> " We made a mistake. A big one. Because of cultural ignorance, but ignorance is not an excuse. And we accept responsibility for this mistake. Yet there is no way of thinking nor believing that this could have ever been intentional. [...] People are at the center of everything we do. This situation is not going to change our values, what defines us, what we stand for and how we act towards one another and to the communities we serve. We will take on this challenge as a mandate to develop a stronger organization. This is a commitment we all share."

- **12 Feb 2019.** In an interview with WWD (Women Wear's Daily), Bizzarri (CEO) apologizes and discusses next steps to amend the situation.

12 Feb 2019. Alessandro Michele (Creative Director) sends a personal letter to the company to address the situation. He recalls the initial inspiration behind the product and apologises.

16 Feb 2019. Gucci launches its first four long-term initiatives to embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company.

↘ **1.** Hiring global and regional directors for diversity and inclusion. ↘ **2.** Setting up a multicultural design scholarship program. ↘ **3.** Launching a diversity and inclusivity awareness program. ↘ **4.** Launching a global exchange program.

18 Mar 2019. Gucci launches its Changemakers program to support social justice issues, including a $5 million fund dedicated to these efforts.

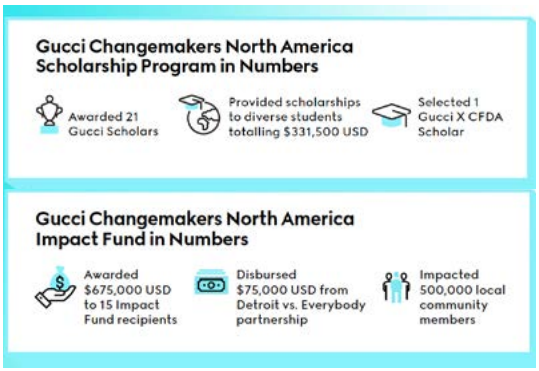
30 Jul 2019. Gucci Appoints Renée E. Tirado as Global Head of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

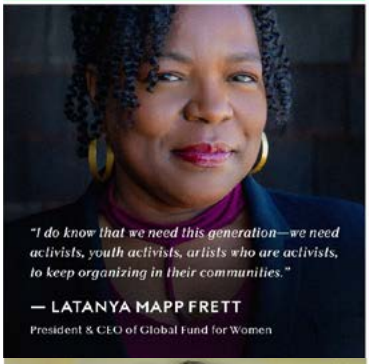
2020-2023. Gucci sustained its social commitment through "Gucci Equilibrium," reinforcing values of diversity, inclusivity, and sustainability. The platform served as a hub for the brand's initiatives, encompassing environmental responsibility, human rights, and social impact. Gucci's ongoing efforts aimed to contribute positively to global challenges and maintain a responsible and accountable brand image.

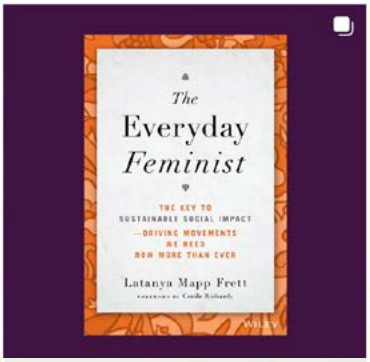
↘ **20 Jul 2022.** Gucci is the first luxury fashion brand to be certified by the Disability Equality Index (DEI)

↘ **10 Jul 2023.** Gucci is the first Italian luxury fashion house to obtain Certificazione della parità di genere (Gender Equality Certification), introduced by the Italian government's Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza - PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan).

It's important for me to let you know that the jumper actually had very specific references, completely different from what was ascribed instead. It was a tribute to Leigh Bowery, to his camouflage art, to his ability to challenge the bourgeois conventions and conformism, to his eccentricity as a performer, to his extraordinary vocation to masquerade meant as a hymn to freedom.







→ Consistency in brand storytelling

Gucci's brand storytelling exhibited consistency through its rebranding efforts, emphasizing long-term initiatives and transparency through reports like the Gucci Equilibrium Impact Report. The commitment to inclusion and diversity took center stage, communicated through educational content, community engagement, and strengthened pre-existing initiatives. New platforms, such as the Gucci Equilibrium Instagram profile and Chime Zine in 2020, contributed to the brand's narrative.

→ Changes in social media communication

Gucci underwent changes in its social media communication by placing increased emphasis on its commitment to diversity and inclusion, exemplified by its support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Notably, in June 2020, Gucci expanded its Instagram presence with the introduction of the @gucciequilibrium profile. The brand incorporated more educational content, visible on both the @gucci and @gucciequilibrium profiles.

Our Commitment

Together with the world, we mourn the loss of George Floyd, and the many Black men and women that we have lost before him. We stand with those demanding justice for the violence against them.

Our unity to combat racism and to fight for equality, as individuals and as a company, is stronger than ever. Injustice and discrimination in all their forms cannot be allowed to prevail.

As Changemakers, we join the fight to end systemic racism, bigotry, police violence and oppression.

We stand in solidarity and in action with the Black community that has always supported us.

Marco Bizzarri, Alessandro Michele and all the Gucci Employees

4. The Fall of Victoria's Secret

In 2018, Victoria's Secret faced criticism for discriminatory comments towards transgender and plus-size women from former executive Ed Razek, raising concerns about the brand's commitment to inclusivity. Additionally, the brand's ties to the Jeffrey Epstein scandal fueled discussions about its image and corporate associations.

→ Background

→ Topic

Controversy hit Victoria's Secret on November 8, 2018, after discriminatory comments by CMO Edward Razek in a Vogue interview about transgender and plus-size women. The brand was also implicated in the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, involving sexual abuse and sex trafficking of underage girls. Epstein, who had a close business and personal relationship with Victoria's Secret CEO Leslie Wexner, pretended to be a talent scout for the brand, manipulating young women by promising them modeling opportunities.

→ Social Issue

Lack of inclusivity, sexual misconduct.

→ Actors

Edward Razek (Chief Marketing Officer), Leslie Wexner (founder and CEO of L Brands, parent company of VS), Jeffrey Epstein (sex offender), former Victoria's Secret models and other major models.

→ Geographical and cultural area

USA

→ Storyline

→ Trigger

The trigger for the controversy at Victoria's Secret was a communication failure marked by offensive messages promoting harmful beauty standards and endorsing discrimination. The brand also faced a social failure due to its ties with individuals involved in sex trafficking. The company underestimated social media's power and failed to adapt to current societal expectations.

→ Timeline

2017. #MeToo movement gains prominence, exposing issues of sexual harassment in various industries, including fashion.

8 Nov 2018. Ed Razek's interview with Vogue about diversifying models casting, where he controversially states that the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show should not include plus-size or transgender models because it represents women's fantasy. The interview sparks criticism for the brand's limited view of beauty standards.

↘ Declining performance: closure of 53 stores.
↘ **2 Dec 2018.** Victoria's Secret Fashion Show is broadcast on ABC, receiving the lowest TV ratings ever with 3.27 million viewers.

5 Mar 2019. 5 Mar 2019. L Brands shareholders step in: investor James Mitarotonda (CEO of Barington Capital Group) urges L Brands to update its brand image and create a more diverse board of directors in a letter addressed to Wexner.

6 July 2019. Jeffrey Epstein is arrested on sex trafficking charges and investigated for sexual assault of minors. Epstein's connections to Victoria's Secret come under scrutiny, revealing that he used his association with the brand to coerce women into sexual acts. Leslie Wexner, the CEO of L Brands, which owns Victoria's Secret, faces increased scrutiny due to his business and personal connections with Epstein. It is revealed that Epstein had full power of attorney over Wexner's assets, further intensifying the controversy.

"We recommend that the Company take swift action to improve the performance of Victoria's Secret, by, among other things, correcting past merchandising mistakes and ensuring that Victoria's Secret is communicating a compelling, up-to-date brand image that resonates with today's consumers. Victoria's Secret's brand image is starting to appear to many as being outdated and even a bit "tone deaf" by failing to be aligned with women's evolving attitudes towards beauty, diversity, and inclusion."

"The Board lacks directors with a diversity of backgrounds, skills, and perspectives sufficient to meet the strategic needs of the Company and ensure that it remains competitive in today's challenging marketplace".

→ **Social Media Action Characteristics**

→ Category of Activism

Backlash

→ Approach

Bottom-up

→ Main platforms

Twitter, Instagram.

→ Forms of online activism

Online Petitions: On August 6, 2019, over 100 models, including former Victoria's Secret Angel Doutzen Kroes and major models like Christy Turlington Burns and Edie Campbell, signed a Model Alliance petition on sexual misconduct, urging Victoria's Secret to commit to a new code of conduct. Another major petition was the #WeAreAllAngels.

Firestorms on Social Media: Backlash extended beyond consumers to employers, models, and other brands. Internet personalities and models, Gigi Gorgeous and Carmen Carrera, were among the first trans women to speak out against Ed Razek, encouraging a boycott of all VS products.

Stakeholders Response on Social Media: Influential models like Karlie Kloss, Lily Aldridge, and Kendall Jenner responded to Razek's remarks about transgender models on their Instagram stories, emphasizing support for inclusivity. Model Alliance, an organization promoting fair treatment in the fashion industry, issued a statement supporting the models who spoke out.

Celebrities Leaving Victoria's Secret: Karlie Kloss publicly expressed her decision to stop working with Victoria's Secret, stating it did not align with her values and the message she wanted to convey to young women.

Employee Testimonials: Former employees, including Casey Crowe Taylor, shared experiences of harassment within the company, highlighting a culture of normalization and lack of accountability.

Criticism from Other Brands: Competitor Third Love criticized Victoria's Secret's outdated views on femininity and gender roles, promoting inclusivity and challenging the notion that inclusivity is a trend.

MODEL ALLIANCE STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO VICTORIA'S SECRET

We are disappointed by the recent comments about trans and plus-size models made by Ed Razek, CMO of L Brands, Victoria's Secret's parent company. Such comments create a hostile work environment for people who do not conform to Victoria's Secret's mold – one that enforces an idea of female beauty that is predominantly white, cisgender, young and thin.

In addition to the brand's issues with lack of diversity and inclusion, Victoria's Secret photographers have faced allegations of sexual misconduct by models, which have yet to be adequately addressed.

If Victoria's Secret is truly a leader, it will join the RESPECT Program so that models and their colleagues can work in a respectful, accountable and inclusive environment. The RESPECT Code requires that all be treated with dignity and respect on the job, regardless of race, size, or gender identity. This is not the "PC" thing to do – this is best business practice.

When any part of our industry is excluded or oppressed, abuse is able to flourish and hurts us all. We can and need to do better.

#Time4RESPECT

modelallianceny • Segui
New York

We are disappointed by the recent comments about trans and plus-size models made by Ed Razek, CMO of L Brands, Victoria's Secret's parent company. Such comments create a hostile work environment for people who do not conform to Victoria's Secret's mold – one that enforces an idea of female beauty that is predominantly white, cisgender, young and thin.

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If Victoria's Secret is truly a leader, it will join the RESPECT Program so that models and their colleagues can work in

Piace a **pam_boy** e **altri**
10 NOVEMBRE 2018

Aggiungi un commento...

robynlawley • Segui

robynlawley Elemento modificato • 253 sett
I have started an online petition -link in bio 👆 JOIN ME and lets help change the minds of Victoria's Secret to be more diverse and inclusive of body shapes and sizes on their runways!
Victoria Secret have dominated the space for almost 30 years by telling women there is only one kind of body beautiful. - you can read more in the link of my bio why it's so important to encourage diversity for our future daughters sake.
Until Victoria's Secret commits to representing ALL women on stage, I am calling for a complete boycott of this year's Victoria's Secret Fashion Show.
It's time Victoria's Secret recognized the buying power and influence of women of ALL ages, shapes, sizes, and ethnicities

Piace a **iamannadaniele** e **altri**
17 OTTOBRE 2018

Aggiungi un commento...

Reuben
@ReubyRube

Victoria's secret can legally present their brand the way they want. But from a moral standpoint, this is disappointing. With the amount of money and power this company has, it's sad that they are continuing to perpetuate heteronormativity and unreasonable body expectations.

Traduci post

Jezebel @Jezebel · 9 nov 2018
Victoria's Secret doesn't want plus-size or trans women walking the runway
trib.al/11VAU15

→ Visual languages

Images Celebrating Body Diversity: Visuals portraying everyday women celebrate body diversity and individuality. Emphasis is placed on authenticity and unretouched beauty, showcasing natural imperfections like stretch marks, scars, and freckles to challenge idealized beauty standards.

Comparison Visuals: Side-by-side visuals contrast Victoria's Secret's traditional marketing approach with more inclusive and body-positive messaging from other brands, like Savage X Fenty. These visuals highlight the need for change and challenge the brand's traditional visual identity.

Limited Use of Memes: Memes were not prevalent in the backlash due to the gravity and complexity of the topic. Memes, being a simplified and shareable format, might not capture the depth of the issues requiring greater sensitivity.

Text-Driven Communication: Visual communication played a smaller role compared to text. Articles, letters, interviews, petitions, captions, tweets, and podcasts provided more formal and personal channels to condemn the brand's misconduct and miscommunication.

→ Case perception

→ Sentiment on social media

The sentiment on social media towards Victoria's Secret (VS) and its angels is predominantly negative. The VS angels are often seen as representatives of the toxic diet culture prevalent in the 2000s. Victoria's Secret, as a brand, is criticized for being disconnected from reality and promoting unattainable beauty standards. The prevailing sentiment suggests a rejection of the brand's messaging and a desire for more inclusive and realistic representations in the fashion industry.

→ Memory retention

Customers, especially in the plus-size community, have not forgotten past transgressions, and the ongoing rebranding is viewed by many as insufficient to cover the brand's past mistakes. Critics highlight the need for more substantial changes, including a size expansion and the use of models that go beyond the hourglass norm, for the brand to truly become inclusive.

→ Keywords trends

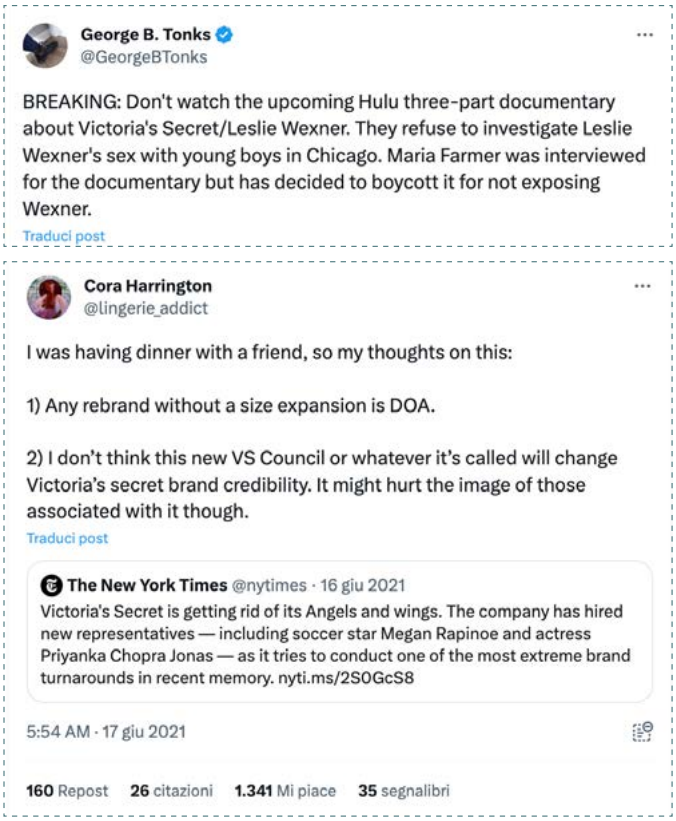
Savage X Fenty, plus-size models, gender fluidity, Ed Razek, Third Love, diversity, rebranding, inclusivity.

→ Traditional media coverage

Traditional media coverage of the Victoria's Secret controversy has been extensive, with major news outlets reporting on the events as they unfolded. The media coverage has been largely critical of Victoria's Secret and its actions. Additionally, a documentary titled "'Victoria's Secret: Angels and Demons'" delves into the connections between Leslie Wexner and Jeffrey Epstein. This documentary contributes to the broader discussion surrounding the controversy and sheds light on the relationships and influences at play within the company.

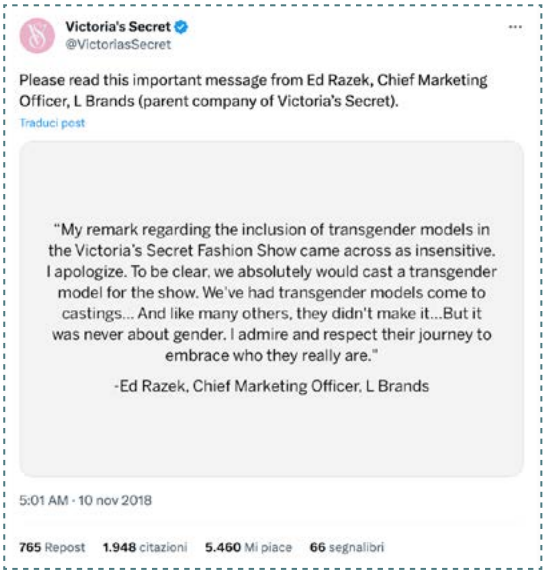
→ Case-specific observations

The Epstein-Wexner relationship and the broader scandal surrounding Jeffrey Epstein have been the subject of significant controversy and public debate. Epstein's criminal case, with links to politicians and businessmen, highlighted some of the secretive behaviors of billionaires. Leslie Wexner's substantial political influence, including financial contributions to organizations involved in the Iraq War, adds another layer to the controversy. Epstein's death, ruled as a suicide but surrounded by conspiracy theories, further fueled speculation. His connections to high-profile figures like Bill Clinton and Donald Trump intensified media scrutiny. The mysterious nature of the relationship between Wexner and Epstein has led to numerous informal investigations and theories, contributing to the perception of the case as a mystery crime with widespread misinformation and conspiracy speculations circulating in public opinion. Additionally, the documentary "'Victoria's Secret: Angels and Demons'" is criticized for not fully portraying certain significant aspects of the Epstein-Wexner relationship. The controversy remains complex and challenging to discern due to the intertwining of factual information and conspiracy theories.



→ Impact on brand communication
→ Short-term impact and brand reaction

- **10 Nov 2018.** Victoria's Secret apology on social media.



- **14 Nov 2018.** Jan Singer, the CEO of Victoria's Secret Lingerie, resigned amid controversies, but Ed Razek, the Chief Marketing Officer, did not step down. The decision to retain Razek, despite his controversial remarks, signaled a perceived lack of concern for critics advocating for more inclusivity within Victoria's Secret. This move raised questions about the company's commitment to addressing the issues raised by the controversies and its willingness to prioritize inclusivity in the face of criticism.
- **10 May 2019.** Wexner announces Victoria's Secret is rethinking its fashion show.

  ↘ **31 July 2019.** Model Shanina Shaik confirms the Victoria's Secret fashion show is cancelled.

  ↘ **21 Nov 2019.** Victoria's Secret officially announces the cancellation of its annual fashion show. L Brands confirms the decision, emphasizing the need to evolve the brand's marketing and communicate its positioning more effectively to customers. The cancellation marks a shift in Victoria's Secret's approach to its marketing strategy.

- **2019.** Victoria's Secret initiates a shift towards more diverse casting.

  ↘ **14 Mar 2019.** Barbara Palvin was named Victoria's Secret's newest Angel. While not classified as plus-size, Palvin was perceived by consumers as representing a healthier and more body-positive image.

  ↘ **1 Aug 2019.** Valentina Sampaio, transgender model, is casted for VS Pink.

- **5 Aug 2019.** Ed Razek resigns.
- **8 Aug 2019.** Leslie Wexner addressed his past ties with Jeffrey Epstein, expressing shock at Epstein's behavior and detailing the discovery of misappropriated funds in 2007. Despite Wexner positioning himself as a victim and expressing condemnation, his apologies were met with skepticism, and L Brands' formal investigation into Epstein's involvement within the company did not release public findings.

"In recent weeks, there has been considerable media attention on my past connection to Jeffrey Epstein. To be clear, I never would have imagined that a person I employed more than a decade ago could have caused so much pain. I condemn his abhorrent behavior in the strongest possible terms and am sickened by the revelations I have read over the past weeks."

"By early fall 2007, [...] we discovered that he had misappropriated vast sums of money from me and my family. [...] With his credibility and our trust in him destroyed, we immediately severed ties with him."

- **20 Feb 2020.** Wexner steps down as CEO of L Brands.
- **2021.** Victoria's Secret launches its rebranding.

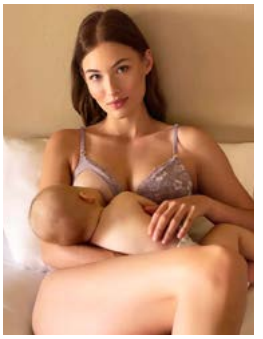
  ↘ **17 Jun 2021.** 17 Jun 2021. Angels are swapped with the VS Collective, a group of seven ambassadors of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and body shapes, selected by the company for their role as activists and equality advocates.

  ↘ **30 July 2021.** It was reported that the parent company of Victoria's Secret would spend $90 million on anti-sexual harassment and diversity plans. This decision followed allegations from shareholders that former leaders had created a "culture of misogyny, bullying, and harassment" within the company.

↘ **3 Aug 2021.** Victoria's Secret officially split from L Brands, forming a new executive team and appointing a majority of female directors to the new board.

"We lost relevance with the modern woman. And she told us very clearly to change our focus from how people look to how people feel — from being about what he wants to being about what she wants." Martin Waters (CEO)

↘ **2021.** Victoria's Secret expands its product lines, including nursing bras, maternity bras and mastectomy bras, signaling a shift towards inclusivity.



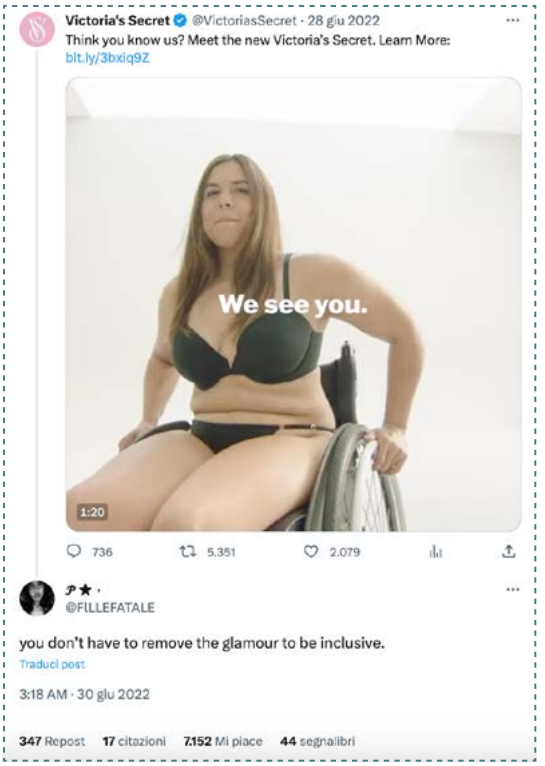
"Most pregnant bodies don't look like this. The image has been sexualized and stylized and made to look that way. That's playing into these new pressures that we know are occurring around women during the pregnancy period. That used to be a protected time in terms of pressures around appearance, a time when women could focus on functionality and growing a human. And now that's no longer the case." Rachel Rodgers

→ Consistency in brand storytelling

Victoria's Secret, once known for presenting an aspirational lifestyle featuring sensual and confident supermodels, faced a shift in branding strategy. The brand's fame, rooted in the celebrity cult of supermodels, declined as awareness grew about the demands on models in the industry. ollowing controversies, Victoria's Secret aimed for a rebranding that highlighted a women-led, inclusive, and relatable image, putting emphasis on inclusivity, diversity, and body positivity. Despite these efforts, criticism surfaced, questioning the authenticity of the shift and suggesting it felt more like a marketing campaign than a genuine commitment to change. Some also noted visual changes in the products, which were perceived as moving towards a utilitarian look rather than embodying the brand's original fantasy aesthetic.

→ Changes in social media communication

Victoria's Secret initially underestimated the influence of social media, with Les Wexner, the brand's leader, being described as the king of brick-and-mortar retail. However. with the advent of social media, online shopping, and platforms like Instagram, the fashion landscape underwent significant changes. In response, Victoria's Secret altered its strategy, recognizing the impact of social media on the industry. The brand shifted its approach to incorporate social media more prominently, aiming to connect with younger audiences. This transition involved moving away from the traditional 'mannequin' angels to a more diverse group of brand ambassadors.



5. Dolce & Gabbana's Cultural Scandal in China

In 2018, Dolce & Gabbana faced backlash after releasing a series of videos that were perceived as insensitive towards Chinese culture. The controversy deepened with offensive messages from co-founder Stefano Gabbana, leading to the show's cancellation and a significant impact on the brand's reputation in China.

→ Background

→ Topic

Dolce & Gabbana's #DGLovesChina and #DGTheGreatShow promotional videos, posted on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo, drew widespread criticism for perpetuating racist stereotypes against Chinese culture.

→ Social Issue

Cultural offense.

→ Actors

Dolce & Gabbana, Stefano Gabbana, Diet Prada.

→ Geographical and cultural area

China.

→ Storyline

→ Trigger

Dolce & Gabbana faced a communication failure, portraying racist stereotypes and failing to consider different cultural sensitivities. Moreover, when confronted with the backlash, the brand did not take immediate accountability. Instead, they made additional racist remarks and controversial statements, further aggravating the situation. The brand also claimed that their social media accounts were hacked rather than taking responsibility for the offensive content.

→ Timeline

- **November 2018.** Dolce & Gabbana planned "The Great Show," a massive Alta Moda (Haute Couture) event scheduled for November 21 in Shanghai. The show would feature 1400 celebrities and influencers, showcasing over 300 runway looks to celebrate the brand's 33rd anniversary.

19 Nov 2018. Dolce & Gabbana posted promotional videos for #DGLovesChina and #DGTheGreatShow on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo.

↘ The campaign faced criticism for perceived racism and discrimination. Chinese audiences pointed out that the portrayal of an Asian model with small eyes and a childish smile perpetuated Western stereotypes. Additionally, cultural symbols like lanterns and couplets were deemed outdated and stereotypical. The use of the term "small-stick" for chopsticks, while praising Italian food, was seen as culturally insensitive and arrogant. The campaign also carried a sexist undertone, and the narrator mispronounced the brand's name.

↘ **19 Nov 2018.** Diet Prada, a prominent fashion watchdog on Instagram, called out Dolce & Gabbana for its controversial campaign, highlighting the racist stereotypes and discriminatory elements.

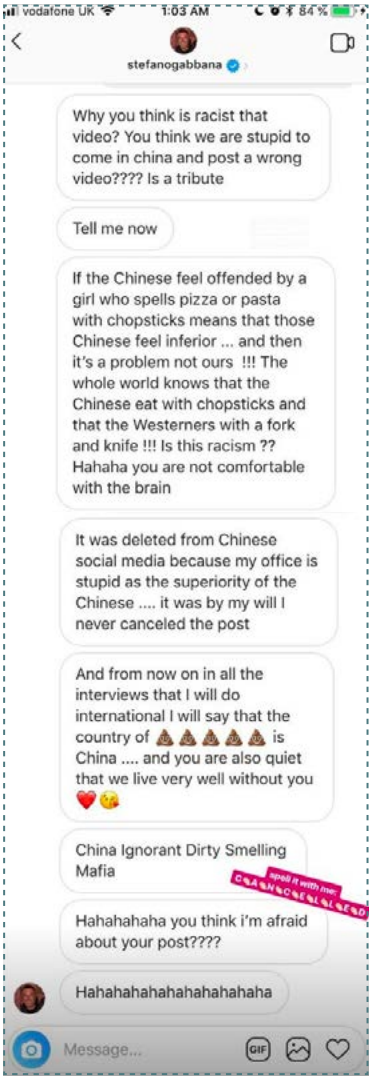
↘ The backlash, both from Chinese and Western consumers, led to the deletion of the post within 24 hours.

↘ Zuo Ye, the model featured in Dolce & Gabbana's controversial campaign, faced backlash as well. She only issued an apology on January 23, 2019.

21 Nov 2018. Diet Prada posted Instagram direct messages between Stefano Gabbana and user Michaela Tranova on its account, revealing racist remarks made by Gabbana.

↘ Dolce&Gabbana claimed that their accounts had been hacked, leading to the unauthorized leak of posts.

> Our Instagram account has been hacked. So as the account of Stefano Gabbana.
> Our legal office is urgently investigating.
> We are very sorry for any distress caused by these unauthorized posts.
> We have nothing but respect for China and the people of China.
>
> DOLCE & GABBANA



21 Nov 2018. Celebrities initiated a boycott of the Dolce&Gabbana show in response to the controversy. Subsequently, the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Shanghai canceled the show.

22 Nov 2018. Dolce&Gabbana faced severe consequences as the brand was removed from various e-commerce platforms, including Yoox-Net-a-Porter Group, Alibaba, JD, Secoo, VIPshop, and Netease, effectively leading to the brand's exclusion from the Chinese market.

→ Social Media Action Characteristics

→ Category of Activism
Backlash

→ Approach
Bottom-up

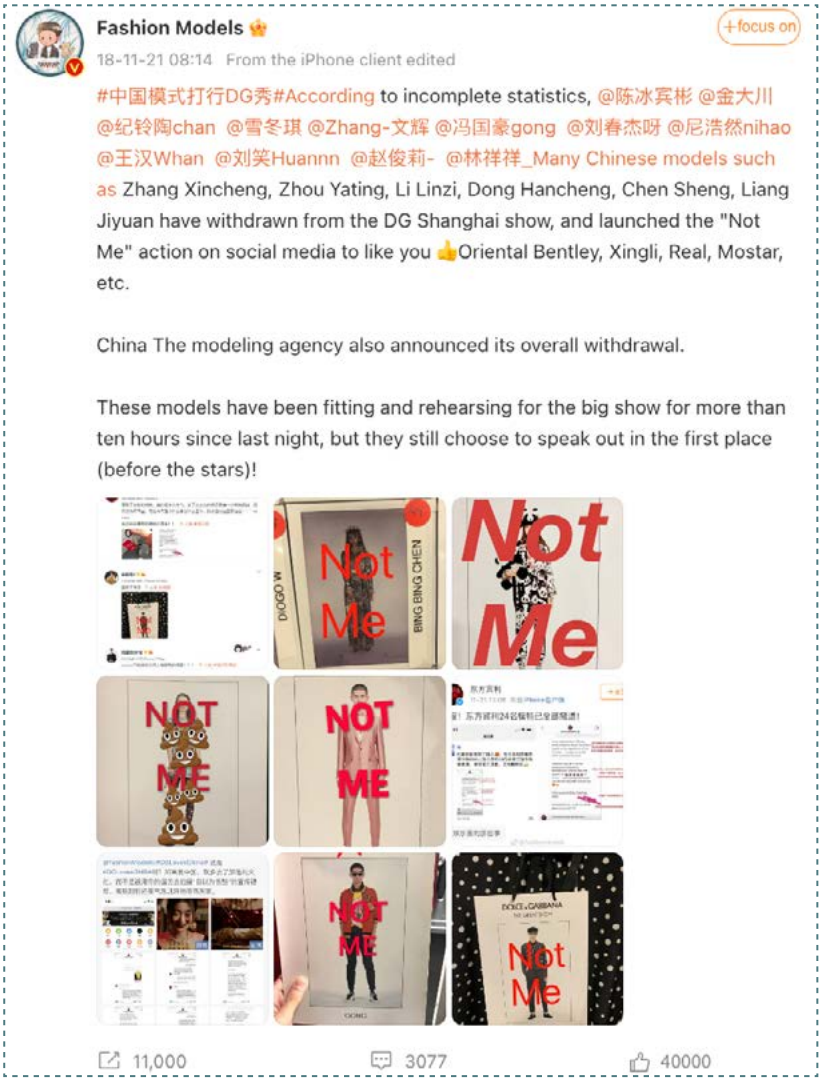
→ Main platforms
Weibo, Instagram.

→ Forms of online activism
Online Fundraising and Legal Defense: Diet Prada initiated an online fundraising campaign for their legal defense against defamation claims by Dolce&Gabbana. The funds were likely used to cover legal expenses in response to the legal action taken by the fashion brand.

Celebrity Boycotts: In response to the controversial advertising campaign by Dolce&Gabbana, several celebrities participated in a boycott. The celebrities distancing themselves from the brand likely had a significant impact on its public image and consumer perception.

"Not Me" Social Media Action: Models, particularly on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, engaged in a "Not Me" social media action. This involved models posting messages with the slogan 'not me' to express their criticism toward Dolce&Gabbana. This response emerged after Stefano Gabbana claimed that he was hacked through the same slogan, prompting models to distance themselves from the brand.

Campaigns on Social and Mainstream Media: A viral video was created and shared by China Central Television (CCTV), the primary state television broadcaster in China. The video aimed to celebrate the traditional use of chopsticks without perpetuating stereotypes or being offensive. It garnered widespread attention and support by over a million viewers on social media platforms.



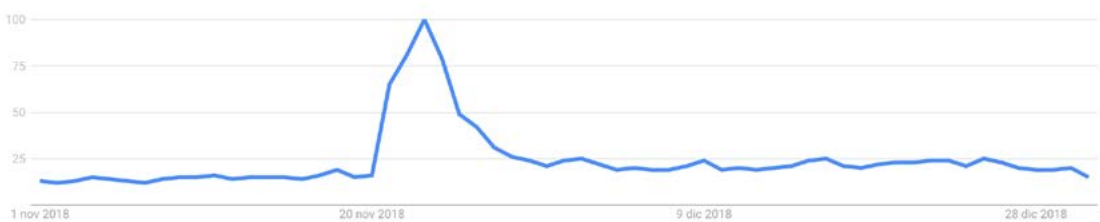
→ Reach and engagement

The reach and engagement surrounding the Dolce&Gabbana controversy were significant, especially on the Weibo platform. Here are key metrics indicating the extensive reach and engagement:

Overall Influence: The incident's influence was 33.2% higher than the average of all incidents, indicating that it received more attention and had a more substantial impact compared to other events.

Weibo Platform Dominance: Weibo played a pivotal role in igniting and spreading the incident, with an influence reaching 82.3. This suggests that Weibo was the primary platform where discussions, criticisms, and reactions were shared and amplified. Between November 21st and November 24th, there were over 50 trending searches related to the incident on Weibo. Thirty-one of these searches reached a peak popularity of more than one million, showcasing the sustained interest and discussion surrounding the controversy.

Hashtag Views on Weibo:
#DG大秀取消 / #D&GBBigShowCancelled: 820 million views
#DG涉嫌辱华 / #D&GSuspectedOfInsultingChina: 410 million views
#DG广告 / #D&GAd: 170 million views
#DG爱中国 / #D&GLovesChina: 15.7 million views



→ Case perception

→ Sentiment on social media

Social media sentiment toward Dolce&Gabbana during the cultural differences controversy was overwhelmingly negative. Chinese social media users tended to express their opinions more directly and critically. The cultural differences controversy led to widespread condemnation, and many users were straightforward and blunt in their criticism of D&G's actions. The negative sentiment extended beyond China, with international audiences also expressing disappointment and criticism. The incident triggered discussions about cultural awareness and the responsibility of global brands. However, the international audience had a weaker reaction to the campaign controversy, failing to fully grasp the underlying issues that sparked outrage in China.

→ Memory retention

While the international audience quickly moved on from the D&G controversy and praised the brand's collection in December 2021, the incident left a lasting impact in China. In 2023, D&G still faces repercussions, with no flagship store on Tmall, limited media coverage, Chinese models distancing themselves, and celebrities, influencers, and retailers cutting ties. The sustained backlash resulted in Shiseido ending its global licensing deal due to underperforming sales in China. Despite efforts, D&G continues to be challenged with the long-term consequences of the cultural misstep. To rebuild connections with the Chinese market, the brand has attempted shifting its target audience to Chinese Americans as part of a long-term strategy.

→ Keywords trends

Diet Prada, chopsticks, racism, China, Shanghai, controversy, boycott, scandal.

→ Traditional media coverage

The traditional media coverage of the Dolce & Gabbana controversy was characterized by a diverse range of sentiments. Some media outlets and individuals accused D&G of cultural insensitivity and perpetuating stereotypes in their controversial campaign. This critical perspective often focused on the brand's misjudgment and the impact it had on their reputation, especially in the Chinese market. On the other hand, there were instances of media coverage that highlighted D&G's efforts to move past the controversy, with a focus on subsequent collections and fashion shows. In this context, Vogue journalist Suzy Menkes became a subject of criticism for providing a positive review of D&G's post-controversy collections. The mixed sentiments within traditional media reflected the ongoing debate surrounding the brand's actions and attempts at recovery.

→ Case-specific observations

Role of Diet Prada: Diet Prada played a pivotal role in the case, acting as a watchdog and raising awareness not only about the immediate controversy but also shedding light on the broader problematic history of Dolce & Gabbana. Their commentary through articles, videos, and social media posts contributed significantly to the public discourse surrounding the brand.

Geographic differences: The case exhibited distinct characteristics based on geographic locations. In China, the controversy was influenced by the use of a "water army", with social media users being paid to generate positive comments and reviews, potentially to mitigate the impact of the scandal. This practice added a layer of complexity to the overall dynamics of the controversy.

→ Impact on brand communication

→ Short-term impact and brand reaction

23 Nov 2018. D&G issues a public apology.

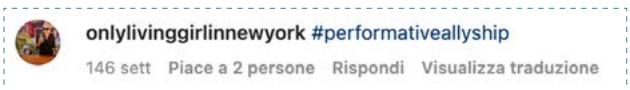
Early 2019. D&G files an action of civil court in Italy for defamation against Tony Liu and Lindsey Schuyler, the founders of Diet Prada. The brand sought damages for a total of €3 million for Dolce & Gabbana and €1 million for Stefano Gabbana. The lawsuit outlined financial implications arising from the controversy, estimating that Dolce & Gabbana incurred a loss of "dozens of millions" as a result of the fallout. The legal action emphasized reputational damage, claiming that the brand spent 150 million euros annually since 2018 to counteract the impact of Diet Prada. The cumulative claims against Diet Prada amounted to 562 million euros, with potential for additional damages.

↘ **1 Mar 2019.** Tony Liu and Lindsey Schuyler, founders of Diet Prada, filed a defense of their freedom of speech in response to the defamation lawsuit by Dolce & Gabbana. Seeking to move the case away from Italy, where defamation cases are more strict, they were represented by the nonprofit Fashion Law Institute at Fordham in collaboration with Italian law firm AMSL Avvocati.

↘ **5 Mar 2019.** Diet Prada initiated a GoFundMe campaign to cover their legal expenses. Remarkably, they successfully reached their target goal in less than a day, showcasing widespread support for their cause.

→ Consistency in brand storytelling

Dolce & Gabbana's redefined brand narrative emphasizes increased inclusivity and diversity through diverse models and respectful cultural references, yet this shift is often seen as primarily at the marketing level. The brand's identity, associated with rebelliousness and political incorrectness, has often relied on exoticizing and eroticizing women's appearance, sometimes based on stereotypes. Post-Shanghai controversy, the Milan show shifted focus to the Italian Renaissance, showcasing opulent clothing and celebrating Italian cultural elements. The brand's storytelling is in fact deeply rooted in Italian DNA, showcasing aspects like Catholicism, femininity, midage, and heterosexuality. For these reasons, attempts to support movements like #BLM in 2020 faced backlash, highlighting the challenges in aligning their narrative with social issues.



→ Changes in social media communication

Dolce & Gabbana's social media communication for the Western audience remained largely unchanged after the scandal, with no major alterations to posts even during the controversy. While international comments generally praised the brand, the Chinese audience continued to criticize it. In a second attempt to approach the Chinese market, the brand featured virtual models and adopted a more neutral communication strategy, avoiding direct mention of the brand name in the ad. Despite these efforts, negative comments persisted. The latest attempt involved connecting with American-Chinese influencers, as Chinese celebrities still avoided collaboration with the brand. However, engaging with a different demographic did not significantly improve the brand's reputation.

6. Valentino's Stand for Inclusivity

In 2021, Valentino faced backlash over a gender-fluid image featuring photographer Michael Bailey Gates. In response to the negative comments, the creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli, supported the model and condemned hate, violence, and discrimination. The incident sparked discussions about challenging societal norms and promoting inclusivity in the fashion industry.

→ Background

→ Topic

Valentino's campaign, featuring a self-portrait by photographer Michael Bailey Gates, sparked controversy due to the androgynous appearance of the model. In response, the brand addressed the backlash, taking a stand against discrimination and hate.

→ Social Issue

Gender discrimination

→ Actors

Pierpaolo Piccioli (Creative Director), Michael Bailey Gates (Photographer and model).

→ Geographical and cultural area

The case had a global reach, receiving significant attention in Italy.

→ Storyline

→ Trigger

In this case, the content was intentionally polarising. Valentino and its creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli made a conscious decision to feature gender fluidity as part of their campaign, fully aware that it might spark controversy. The backlash they received was not due to a miscommunication or misunderstanding of their message, but rather a reflection of differing societal views on gender norms and representation. While the image did receive negative reactions, it also started a conversation about diversity and inclusion in fashion, allowing Valentino to take a stand against hate and discrimination.

→ Timeline

10 Apr 2021. 10 Apr 2021. #ValentinoCollezioneMilano campaign is posted on Instagram. One of the pictures depicts a naked self-portrait of photographer Michael Bailey-Gates. The caption states: **"A freedom of expression and an appreciation for the boundlessness of individuality marks the new #ValentinoCollezioneMilano campaign, featuring a self-portrait by photographer @michaelbaileygates with the Valentino Garavani #RomanStud."**

↘ The image sparked outrage on Instagram, with people flooding the comments with negativity and vomit emojis. Negative comments accused Valentino and Michael Bailey-Gates of "gender-bending", "going against nature", "poisoning the children", and "disrespecting women". Some men felt offended by the portrayal of virility in a feminine-like body, while women criticized the replacement of a woman model with a man acting like a woman.

11 Apr 2021. Pierpaolo Piccioli reposts the picture and shares a message condemning discriminatory comments and celebrating inclusivity and freedom of expression in fashion.

14 Apr 2021. Michael Bailey Gates expresses gratitude for the support and encourages redirecting attention towards addressing the challenges faced by trans youth. He specifically highlights the concerning bills targeting trans youth proposed and passed in the United States, mobilizing support for broader advocacy efforts.

"After we posted this picture on Maison Valentino a lot of people reacted with hateful and aggressive comments. My job is to deliver my vision of beauty according to the time we are living and beauty and whom we consider beautiful, is a reflection of our own values. We are witnessing a big, huge shift in human kind, the movements of self awareness are all leaded by the same idea: evolution is possible if equality is possible, if inclusivity is possible, if human rights are defended and freedom of expression is protected and nurtured. Hate is not an expression, hate is a reaction to fear and fear can easily turn into violence, which can be either a comment or an aggression to two guys kissing in a subway. We have to stand against and condemn all form of violence, hate, discrimination and racism and I'm proud to use my voice and my work to do so, now and forever. This picture is a self portrait of young beautiful man and evil is in the eye of the beholder, not in his naked body. Change is possible, no one ever said that it would be easy but I am ready to face difficulties, in the name of freedom, love, tolerance and growth." Pierpaolo Piccioli

→ Social Media Action Characteristics

→ Category of Activism
Brand bravery

→ Approach
Top-down

→ Main platforms
The controversy was limited to Instagram.

→ Forms of online activism
Social Media Campaign: Valentino's campaign aimed to provoke and spark conversations about gender norms and representation in fashion. The provocative nature of the campaign challenged binary norms, using a naked body to convey a message of breaking stereotypes of masculinity.

Personal Storytelling: Michael Bailey-Gates, as part of the LGBTQ+ community, used his personal story and image to challenge traditional gender norms and promote diversity in the fashion industry. By appearing in the campaign, he brought visibility to non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals in a high-profile fashion campaign. On the other hand, Pierpaolo Piccioli Piccioli used the campaign to share his personal values as a designer. He affirmed that his creative work is guided by freedom of expression and that his job is to provide his vision of beauty based on the times we are living in. To him, beauty is a reflection of our values.

Online Fundraising: Michael Bailey-Gates encouraged supporters to donate to the Trans Justice Funding Project, a community-led funding initiative supporting grassroots, trans justice groups run by and for trans people. This form of activism involved directing financial support to relevant causes.

Information Activism: Michael Bailey-Gates shared the profiles of trans activists, encouraging followers to engage with and support these individuals. This form of activism involved spreading information about key figures in the trans rights movement.

→ Visual languages
The campaign featuring Michael Bailey Gates mainly used one provocative image of him, completely nude except for a Valentino bag. This image was shared and discussed widely on social media, becoming the central visual element of the controversy. Despite being a single image, it sparked significant discussion and debate about gender norms and representation in fashion. Captions framed the image in different ways to enhance its message.

→ Reach and engagement
The reach and engagement of the Valentino campaign were notable within the context of the brand's Instagram profile. While the controversy may not have reached the same widespread attention as other scandals, it became the post with the highest engagement on Valentino's Instagram, with over 12,800 comments. The campaign's impact was measured not only by the engagement metrics but also by the loss of 12,316 followers for Valentino, indicating that the creative decision sparked reactions among the audience. The controversy might have been mitigated by the fact that Valentino's target audience could be more accepting or understanding of creative choices in the fashion industry. This perspective could have influenced the extent of the controversy.

→ Case perception

→ Sentiment on social media

Reactions to the Valentino campaign on social media varied widely, with comments falling into six categories: approval for beauty and love, disapproval with insults, criticism on gender issues and marketing, threats of boycotting, confusion about the message, and nostalgia for the brand's past. This diversity highlighted the provocative and polarizing nature of the campaign.

→ Memory retention

The Valentino campaign controversy had a short-term impact, generating a wave of reactions on social media. While some expressed support for the campaign's message of freedom of expression and inclusivity, others had negative views. In the long term, the controversy may have contributed to ongoing discussions about gender norms and representation in fashion, given that similar themes are frequently addressed by the brand.

→ Keywords trends

The word frequency trends in the Valentino post comment section include positive terms such as "beautiful," "love," and "like," as well as negative expressions like "disgusting", "horrible", and "unfollow". Additionally, common words found are "comments" and "people".

→ Traditional media coverage

The campaign received media attention but was not as widespread as other controversies in the fashion industry. The media coverage mostly focused on the campaign's message of freedom of expression and inclusivity. It noted the backlash received on social media but mostly focused on Pierpaolo Piccioli's statement, applauding him for condemning hate speech.

→ Case-specific observations

Wider political context in Italy: In some instances, Italian media outlets contextualized the controversy as part of a broader societal debate in Italy, particularly around the Zan DDL, a proposed law against homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny. The controversy was viewed as relevant in the context of ongoing discussions about identity preservation and defense, especially given recent homophobic events. On April 14, 2021, just days after the controversy, Pierpaolo Piccioli further supported the cause by posting a picture in favor of the Zan DDL, reinforcing the values he aims to convey at Valentino.

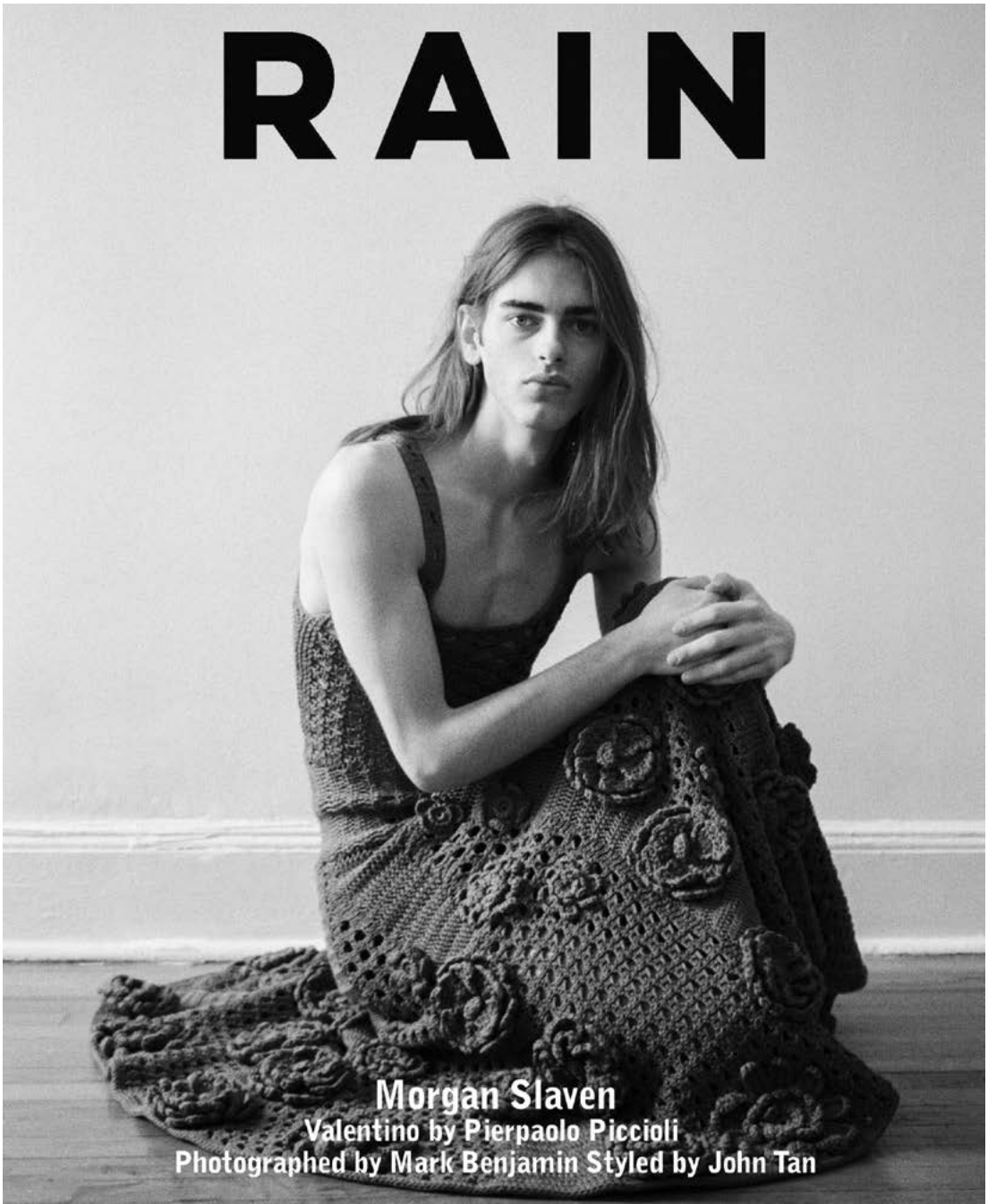
Wider context in the US: Similarly, when Michael Bailey-Gates reposted his photo in response to the backlash, he strategically shifted the focus from his self-portrait to a controversial reality in the U.S., specifically legislations impacting transgender minors. In addressing this situation, he encouraged donations, redirecting attention towards a broader societal issue.

→ Impact on brand communication

→ Consistency in brand storytelling

Under the creative helm of Pierpaolo Piccioli, Valentino has demonstrated a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion in both campaigns and collections. Embracing gender fluidity, celebrating body and age inclusivity with diverse models like Lynne Koester and Marie Sophie Wilson, and through campaigns like "Portrait Of A Generation", the brand consistently advocates for individuality, freedom, and diversity. This consistency in messaging aligns with the brand's values under Pierpaolo Piccioli's creative direction, promoting a diverse and inclusive representation across various dimensions.

RAIN



Morgan Slaven
Valentino by Pierpaolo Piccioli
Photographed by Mark Benjamin Styled by John Tan

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