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Screen style: Visual elements and brand identity in fashion films

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how fashion films are perceived by different audience segments, with a focus on two primary visual elements: costume and cinematography. Using an experimental and segmentation-based approach, the study assesses how these elements influence the perception of brand identity. A sample of 318 participants, segmented by their relationship with fashion, were shown a fashion film and then completed a structured questionnaire. The results show that fashion professionals and students consistently value these visual elements more than ordinary consumers, and that their perception is positively associated with the effectiveness of brand communication. The findings highlight the symbolic power of costume and cinematography in constructing aesthetic, emotional, and cultural meanings. From a strategic perspective, the study suggests that fashion films can be highly effective tools for communicating brand identity, particularly when targeting more fashion-savvy audiences. This research contributes to a better understanding of how fashion films function as symbolic and immersive branding experiences.

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Fashion films; brand identity; visual narrative; audience perception; fashion branding

1. Introduction

Although academic interest in the symbolic and aesthetic value of fashion films (FFs) has grown, a significant empirical gap remains, especially regarding how audiences perceive, decode, and respond to these visual narratives in the context of brand communication. Most existing research focuses on visual aesthetics or branding strategies from a production standpoint, overlooking how audiences decode and engage with Fashion Films (FFs) across diverse cultural contexts, such as Portugal. This study seeks to address that gap with a data-driven, audience-centred approach.

In recent years, FFs have gained prominence in the global fashion industry as narrative-driven marketing tools. By telling visual stories, brands can engage audiences in more immersive and emotionally resonant ways, moving away from traditional advertising formats (Blancheton 2021; Lee, Fiore, and Kim 2011; Rao, Agarwal, and Dahlhoff 2021; Wu, Lin, and Chen 2013). Through storytelling, fashion brands create visual narratives that foster a deeper connection with consumers through immersive experiences, increasingly distancing

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themselves from traditional advertising (Buffo 2017; Uhlirova 2013; Xie and Youn 2020). International fashion brands, such as Miu Miu (part of the Prada group), are known for their bold and irreverent use of fashion films to explore disruptive and socially relevant themes. These productions often combine auteur cinematography and conceptual storytelling to convey brand values that extend beyond mere product promotion. In contrast, the Portuguese fashion industry has adopted fashion films more gradually. However, this trend has been steadily growing, particularly among innovative and high-end designer brands such as Katty Xiomara. These brands utilize fashion films to convey their identity, showcase their collections, and foster deeper emotional connections with consumers through unique and visually distinctive narratives. Although brands increasingly use fashion films as tools for digital communication, little is known about how consumers, particularly in Portugal, perceive these audiovisual narratives. Specifically, the extent to which fashion films influence brand recognition, emotional engagement, and purchase intent remains underexplored. To fill this gap, this study analyses explicitly how fashion students and professionals interpret the visual elements of fashion films, namely costume design and cinematography, and how these interpretations influence the construction of brand identity.

In addition to the relationship between visual elements and brand identity, contemporary literature highlights the importance of theoretical frameworks, such as Narrative Transportation Theory, which describes how emotional immersion in a coherent visual narrative can enhance symbolic persuasion (Green and Appel, 2024). Recent systematic reviews confirm that narrative transports the viewer to a state of absorption where attention, emotion, and mental representations are focused on the story, reducing critical resistance and strengthening connection with the brand (Thomas and Grigsby 2024).

Furthermore, Uses and Gratifications Theory continues to offer a helpful framework for interpreting audience motivations regarding FFs: different segments seek varied gratifications, from aesthetic and identity experiences to informative exploration of the brand's universe, elements particularly relevant in the context of modern visual consumption (Bhatiasevi 2024).

These theories directly support the hypotheses formulated, as they recognize that the appreciation of visual elements depends not only on their aesthetics but also on the motivation, cultural repertoire, and symbolic repertoire of each audience.

Based on the theoretical literature and the research objectives, this study formulates two hypotheses to guide its empirical analysis:

Hypothesis 1. Fashion students and professionals value visual elements, specifically costume design and cinematography, more than casual consumers.

Hypothesis 2. The greater the value attributed to visual elements in fashion films, the stronger the perceived ability of these films to convey brand identity.

These hypotheses are based on the understanding that symbolic visual codes, such as costume design and cinematography, play a fundamental role in brand communication and that fashion knowledge shapes how the audience interprets these elements.

The following sections provide the conceptual basis for each hypothesis.

By applying descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, and multivariate analyses, this study examines the impact of fashion films on brand visibility, recognition, and emotional

engagement. The results aim to expand both theoretical and practical understandings of FFs as strategic brand communication tools, offering relevant implications for marketers, filmmakers, and fashion professionals. Although FFs are increasingly adopted by luxury fashion brands as part of their global communication strategies, empirical research on how audiences perceive and interpret these films remains limited, particularly within specific cultural contexts such as Portugal. Most existing studies focus on the aesthetic or conceptual dimensions of FFs, overlooking the impact of visual storytelling on consumer perceptions of brand identity (Buffo 2017; Chang and Suh 2017).

Moreover, few studies have explored how different audience segments, such as professionals, students, and casual consumers, respond to FFs. To address this gap, the present research adopts a quantitative approach, using a structured questionnaire administered during a major national fashion event. This allows for the analysis of how FFs influence brand communication across varying levels of fashion engagement.

A detailed review of the most relevant literature on fashion films and their communicative functions, summarized in the Appendix, supports the theoretical foundation of this study and identifies the main gaps addressed.

The article is organized as follows: [Section 2](#) reviews the literature on FFs and brand communication; [Section 3](#) outlines the methodological approach; [Section 4](#) presents the results and their interpretation; [Section 5](#) offers a critical discussion; and [Section 6](#) concludes with practical implications and limitations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical context: fashion films and brand communication

FFs have become increasingly prominent in the communication strategies of contemporary fashion brands. They offer immersive narratives that blend cinematic aesthetics, emotional storytelling, and brand values in a cohesive and expressive format (Park et al. 2021; Hines and Bruce 2007). Unlike traditional advertising, FFs focus on visual language and symbolic representation, enabling emotional engagement and fostering deeper connections between the brand and its audience (Barnard 2014; Yusuf 2023).

According to Lopes, Sandes, and Damásio (2024), the convergence of fashion, cinema, and marketing enables brands to construct visual discourses that articulate their identity in meaningful ways. Miu Miu, for instance, is known for using FFs to promote collections while communicating disruptive narratives that align with its core values and aesthetic codes. Through this medium, fashion brands can construct immersive brand worlds where consumers interact with symbolic, sensory, and emotional cues (Pencarelli et al. 2020).

The proliferation of social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, has further extended the reach and impact of FFs, making them accessible to broader and more targeted audiences. Studies suggest that contemporary consumers respond more favourably to authentic and emotionally deep audiovisual content, rather than traditional promotional discourse (Kim and Sullivan 2019).

To support the conceptual framework of this study, a synthesis of relevant literature was compiled. These studies examine the intersections between FFs, branding, consumer perception, and symbolic communication. The following table ([Table 1](#)) presents

Table 1. Relevant literature on fashion films and brand communication.

Author(s), Year	Theme	Fashion Film/ Brand	Context/Case Study
Uhlirova (2013)	Conceptual exploration of FFs	Various	Theoretical foundation for FFs
Buffo (2017)	Visual storytelling in FFs	Various	Narrative & aesthetic roles in storytelling
Chang and Suh (2017)	Consumer response to FFs	N/A	Emotional and symbolic responses
Kim and Sullivan (2019)	Audiovisual engagement and branding	Various FFs	Sound & image in brand perception
Ko, Costello, and Taylor (2019)	Luxury branding and digital content	Luxury brands	Emotional engagement & symbolism
Park et al., 2021	Digital communication through FFs	Various	FFs on digital platforms
Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele (2019)	Symbolic value and purchasing decisions	N/A	Impact of FFs on memory and behavior
Wang (2024)	Costume as a narrative device	Haute couture FFs	Costume in brand storytelling
Muller (2016)	Costume and brand recall	Various	Semiotics in FFs
Yusuf (2023)	Narrative depth and emotional connection	Miu Miu, others	Audiovisual immersion
Lopes, Sandes, and Damásio (2024)	Speculative design and FFs	Miu Miu, Katty Xiomara	Portuguese FFs and future scenarios
Barnard (2014)	Semiotics and fashion communication	N/A	Theory of meaning in FFs
Kapferer (2012)	Luxury brand identity	High-end fashion brands	Symbolism & identity coherence
Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote (2016)	Brand storytelling	N/A	Cross-platform narrative consistency

Source: Author's elaboration based on literature review.

a comparative overview of key academic contributions, organized by author, theme, fashion film or brand studied, and contextual focus.

In addition to mapping the literature, a critical synthesis was adopted, analyzing FFs as marketing tools within integrated communication strategies, where the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions are articulated with strategic brand objectives. This perspective shifts the descriptive focus to a framework that connects narrative, semiotics, and identity management.

Despite the growing academic interest in FFs, most existing studies remain more focused on production rather than consumer perception. Empirical research is practically non-existent on how different consumer segments interpret FFs and the impact of these interpretations on fashion brand communication. This gap is even more evident in the Portuguese context, where FFs are expanding but remain under-researched. Thus, this study aims to address this issue by examining how Portuguese consumers perceive the visual elements of FFs, how these perceptions vary across different audience profiles, and how they relate to brand identity, strategic integration, and emotional rapport. By adopting a consumer-centered quantitative approach, this study provides relevant empirical evidence on a subject that has been dominated by conceptual and aesthetic discourse.

2.2. Hypotheses and conceptual framework

Based on the theoretical literature and research goals, this study formulates four hypotheses to guide its empirical analysis:

Hypothesis 1. Visual elements in fashion films are valued differently, with costume design being the most valued.

Hypothesis 2. Professionals and students in the fashion field value visual elements more than do heavy or light consumers.

The conceptual model underlying these hypotheses is illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

As demonstrated in the conceptual model, the study assumes that personalized design and cinematography influence the perception of brand identity and that this relationship is moderated by audience segment. The following subsections expand on the theoretical foundations of each hypothesis.

2.3. Visual elements and aesthetic appreciation

Fashion films rely on a combination of visual and narrative elements to communicate brand meaning. Among these, costume design stands out as a powerful tool for visual storytelling, often acting as an extension of the brand's identity (Muller 2016; Wang 2024). In haute couture FFs, costumes are not merely decorative but serve as narrative devices that encode artistic and cultural messages aligned with the brand's image.

Cinematography also plays a critical role in FFs, particularly through framing, lighting, and camera movement. These visual techniques are often inspired by auteur cinema and contribute to a sophisticated aesthetic that differentiates FFs from conventional advertising (Rees-Roberts 2018; Needham 2013). Music and sound design further amplify the emotional tone of FFs, enhancing immersion and reinforcing brand messaging (Kim and Sullivan 2019; Yusuf 2023).

Previous studies demonstrate that the effectiveness of visual elements lies precisely in how these visual elements are integrated coherently and symbolically

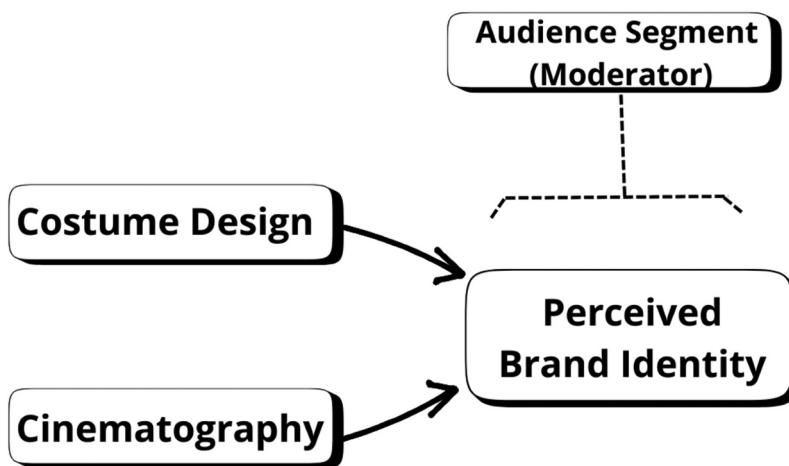


Figure 1. Custom design links the conceptual model and cinematography in fashion films to perceived identity, modified by audience segment.

(Iwasaki 2007; Yusuf 2023). Through this integration, visual elements differentiate themselves from conventional advertising, assuming the role of 'audiovisual experiences' that communicate brand values with aesthetic and narrative depth. Furthermore, authors such as Ko, Costello, and Taylor (2019) and Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele (2019) argue that visual elements, particularly in luxury brands, are perceived as conveying symbolic and emotional value, thereby influencing brand perception and cultural aspirations.

Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1. Visual elements in fashion films are valued differently, with costume design being the most valued.

2.4. Audience segmentation and perception differences

The interpretation and appreciation of fashion films vary according to the viewer's level of involvement with fashion. Fashion professionals and students tend to decode FFs with greater analytical depth, attributing symbolic and aesthetic meaning to costumes, cinematography, and overall visual codes (Workman and Freeburg 2010). In contrast, light or casual consumers often perceive FFs primarily as entertainment or aesthetic displays (Lee, Fiore, and Kim 2011).

Drawing on the Jobs to Be Done Theory (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2016), FFs can be understood as content 'hired' by viewers to fulfil emotional, aspirational, or symbolic needs, such as inspiration, brand affinity, or personal identification. The Narrative Transportation Theory (Green and Brock 2000) also reinforces that emotional immersion in storytelling increases engagement, which tends to be stronger among audiences with greater fashion literacy.

Empirical studies support the existence of significant differences in how different audiences interpret audiovisual fashion content. Ko, Costello, and Taylor (2019) demonstrate that the degree of engagement with the fashion world directly influences the interpretation and appreciation of visual content. Similarly, Sabiote (2016) and De Jong, Harkink, and Barth (2008) emphasize that visual narratives tend to be more effective with audiences who value the aesthetic and symbolic consistency of brands.

From a theoretical perspective, several frameworks support this audience segmentation. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1974) clarifies that different audiences seek different gratifications. Professionals and students use fashion films as tools for visual research, creative inspiration, or identity reinforcement. At the same time, occasional consumers tend to value them primarily as a source of aesthetic stimulation and entertainment (Rehman, 2023).

The Narrative Transportation theory (Green and Appel 2024; Green and Brock 2000) adds that audiences more familiar with fashion's narrative codes are more likely to experience a state of emotional immersion, which favours symbolic identification with the brand.

Finally, the Jobs to Be Done approach (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2016) proposes that individuals seek out specific content based on a specific task or need, whether for symbolic belonging, aspirational aesthetics, or emotional identification. This

perspective allows us to understand why identical content is consumed and interpreted differently depending on the consumer's profile.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1974) further supports this segmentation, highlighting that media is consumed based on specific user motivations. For professionals and students, FFs may represent professional tools or sources of inspiration, while for other audiences, they may fulfil more recreational functions.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 2. Professionals and students in the fashion field value visual elements more than do heavy or light consumers.

2.5. Brand identity and strategic integration

Brand identity encompasses the symbolic, emotional, and aesthetic associations that a brand seeks to communicate to its audiences. According to Aaker (2007), identity is not merely a visual construct, but a multidimensional system that includes brand personality, values, and promises. In the fashion industry, where perception, symbolism, and visual storytelling are central, communicating identity effectively is critical to differentiation and long-term brand positioning (Kapferer 2012; Beverland 2005).

FFs offer a unique opportunity to build and express brand identity through cohesive visual narratives. By integrating costume design, cinematography, music, and storytelling, FFs go beyond product display and construct immersive brand universes that engage consumers on both emotional and aesthetic levels (Kim and Sullivan 2019; Rees-Roberts 2018). They serve as platforms for symbolic encoding, reinforcing what the brand stands for and how it wants to be perceived.

Narrative branding, defined as the strategic use of storytelling to structure brand meaning, has been shown to enhance memorability, engagement, and emotional resonance (Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote 2016; Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu 2005). When applied in FFs, narrative branding transforms static identity traits into dynamic audiovisual experiences. These experiences help align internal brand culture with external perception, reinforcing trust and brand coherence (Kapferer 2012; Holt 2004).

The strategic integration of FFs into a brand's communication ecosystem, via websites, digital campaigns, fashion shows, and social media platforms, amplifies their effectiveness. Studies demonstrate that consistency across platforms strengthens brand recall and enables FFs to act as a connective tissue between the product, brand story, and consumer aspirations (Ko, Costello, and Taylor 2019; Park et al., 2021). In this context, FFs are no longer supplementary content but function as central elements of brand strategy.

Research on luxury branding emphasizes the importance of aligning identity with multisensory brand expressions (Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele 2019). FFs offer precisely this multisensory approach, allowing brands to present narratives that are emotionally evocative, culturally situated, and symbolically rich. When these elements are perceived as consistent and meaningful, they increase consumer trust and long-term attachment (Lindgreen, Beverland and Vallaster 2021).

Additional details on the reviewed sources and their thematic categorization are provided in [Appendix A](#).

3. Methodology and experimental design

This study adopts a quantitative experimental design to investigate the communicative impact of FFs across different audience profiles. The rationale behind this choice lies in the need to assess specific perceptions and behavioural tendencies triggered by exposure to FFs, compared to traditional visual formats. By exposing two groups to distinct brand content formats, static and audiovisual, the study tests how FFs influence consumers' perceptions of brand identity, narrative effectiveness, and emotional connection.

The research follows a deductive methodological approach, in which hypotheses derived from existing literature are empirically tested using structured data collection and statistical analysis. The study is grounded in brand communication theory (Aaker 2007), which emphasizes the importance of coherent and multisensory messaging across platforms in establishing a brand identity. It also draws upon Kim's (2020) conceptualization of FFs as immersive brand experiences, where visual and auditory components, such as cinematography, costume design, and sound, play a central role in shaping brand perception and emotional engagement.

FFs offer a hybrid format that blends narrative cinema with commercial objectives, making them particularly suitable for studying how audiences respond to symbolic storytelling and visual branding. Given the increasing relevance of FFs in digital marketing strategies, particularly in the luxury and designer segments, this study aims to examine their effectiveness through an experimental, comparative framework empirically.

Considering its exploratory nature and use of a non-probabilistic sample, the results are not intended to be generalised to the broader population. Instead, they offer indicative trends and insights that can inform future research and strategic applications in fashion communication. The study positions itself as a foundational investigation into how FFs function as branding tools in segmented consumer contexts and how visual and narrative strategies resonate differently across audience profiles.

The objectives of this study are threefold:

- (1) To investigate whether awareness of FFs enhances brand perception and engagement.
- (2) To examine whether this effect differs across audience segments with varying levels of fashion involvement.
- (3) To assess which visual and narrative elements are most effective in brand communication through FFs.

The following subsections describe the participant profile, experimental design, instrument construction, and data analysis procedures used to test the study's four hypotheses.

The study included a total of 318 participants, aged between 18 and 76 years ($M = 34.12$; $SD = 10.41$), recruited using non-probability sampling methods. Data collection took place online and offline, including during Lisbon Fashion Week. All participants completed the full questionnaire.

The study uses a non-probabilistic and geographically constrained sample, compatible with its exploratory aim of reaching subsets of the fashion audience, for example, (light/heavy consumers, professionals/students), adding analytical depth by focusing on intra-group comparisons rather than population generalizations. This approach is often employed in social science research when targeting specific subgroups or when random sampling is not feasible (Bryman 2016).

Participants were asked to classify their relationship with fashion, selecting from several categories: fashion student, professional, frequent shopper, blogger/influencer, trend-seeker, and occasional consumer. Based on these responses, a grouping variable was created to classify participants as light consumers, heavy consumers, or professionals and/or students in the fashion field. This segmentation was used to test the second hypothesis (H2), which examines how audience profiles influence the evaluation of visual elements and brand identity in FFs.

The demographic profile of the participants is presented in Table 2.

3.1. Experimental design and procedure

This study employed a simplified experimental design using a single stimulus (fashion film), focusing on differences in interpretation between audience subgroups (fashion professionals, students, and casual consumers). Participants were exposed to a selected fashion film (Alma, by Katty Xiomara, or Close, by Miu Miu) and then asked to evaluate the visual elements and perception of brand identity. These films were chosen for their narrative depth, visual sophistication, and alignment with brand identity. The inclusion of two carefully selected fashion films represents the study's exploratory approach, which allows for a controlled comparison of audience perceptions based on brand-aligned storylines and visuals (Kankam 2020). This study

Table 2. Demographic profile of participants.

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	218	68.6%
	Male	85	26.7%
	Non-binary	10	3.1%
	Other	5	1.6%
Age	$M = 34.12, SD = 10.41$		
Region	Lisbon and the Tagus Valley	232	73.0%
	Central Portugal	42	13.2%
	Northern Portugal	18	5.7%
	Algarve	11	3.5%
	Alentejo	7	2.2%
	Azores	3	0.9%
	Madeira	2	0.6%
	Other countries	3	0.9%
Engagement with Fashion (multiple answers allowed)	Interested in fashion trends	146	45.9%
	Frequent buyer	104	32.7%
	Fashion professional	32	10.1%
	Fashion student	128	40.3%
	Blogger/Influencer	23	7.2%
Group Classification	Occasional consumer	59	18.6%
	Light consumers	60	19.0%
	Heavy consumers	112	35.2%
	Professionals and/or students	146	45.9%

Source: Author's elaboration based on questionnaire data (2025).

employed two fashion films as stimuli; although the limited selection restricted generalizability, it ensured internal control, a crucial aspect in experimental designs (Babbie 2010). These films were chosen for their high alignment with brand identity, narrative richness, and visual sophistication, all of which are important criteria for evaluating symbolic and aesthetic communication in FFs.

3.2. Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: a Control Group (CG), which viewed a still campaign image accompanied by a descriptive paragraph, and an Experimental Group (EG), which viewed a Fashion Film by the same brand. FFs were selected for their narrative depth and visual sophistication, including 'Alma' by Katty Xiomara and 'Close' by Miu Miu. Both groups completed the same questionnaire. The allocation was balanced using Qualtrics' randomizer tool.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the questionnaire by providing them with a brief overview of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the voluntary nature of their participation and assurances of confidentiality. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Consent was indicated by participants' agreement to proceed with the questionnaire.

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between variables. For such a purpose, Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) was adopted due to its open-source nature. Specific descriptive statistics were performed to provide an overview of the sample and key variables. At the same time, Pearson's correlations and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) were used to explore the relationships and differences between constructs. Afterwards, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to understand the specific differences identified in the MANOVA procedures and to determine the appropriate post hoc analysis. For both MANOVA and ANOVA, the statistical analysis was adequate, considering the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances, as explored through the Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's tests, respectively.

Consistent with the ethical standards for research in the social sciences and humanities, all participants in the study provided voluntary, anonymous, and informed consent. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants received a brief explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation, including the right to withdraw at any time. The study did not involve sensitive data or pose risks to participants and therefore, did not require formal approval from an institutional ethics committee. The data collected were used exclusively for academic purposes.

All procedures involving human participants were carried out according to the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Before completing the questionnaire, participants received detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures, and they gave informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time without penalty. All responses were anonymized, and only aggregated data were analyzed and reported.

3.3. Instrument design and variables

The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

- Consent and demographic data
- Exposure to the stimulus (fashion film only)
- Evaluation of visual elements, focusing on costume design and cinematography
- Perceptions of brand communication, specifically the film's perceived ability to convey brand identity

The items were measured using 5-point Likert scales and were adapted from previous studies on visual branding and fashion marketing (Kim and Sullivan 2019; Wang 2024). The questionnaire focused on two main areas: the evaluation of visual elements (costume design and cinematography) and the perceived ability of fashion films to convey brand identity. A small pilot test ($n = 12$) was conducted to confirm the clarity, relevance, and apparent validity of all items. Due to the use of single-item measures, internal consistency coefficients (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) were not calculated.

3.4. Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using JASP (version 0.18.3). To test H1, ANOVA was applied to detect significant differences between audience segments (professionals, students, casual consumers) in their evaluation of visual elements (costumes and cinematography).

To test H2, Pearson's correlation was used to assess the relationship between the appreciation of visual elements and the perceived ability of the film to convey brand identity.

Assumptions of normality (Shapiro-Wilk) and homogeneity (Levene's test) were verified before analysis. The significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$.

The assumptions of multivariate normality and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices were not fully met; we report Pillai's Trace, which is recognized as the most robust statistic under such conditions (Olson 1974; Tabachnick and Fidell 2019).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Participants were asked to select the visual elements they value in fashion films, allowing for multiple selections. In this sense, the most valued visual element was costume design, with 205 participants (65.1%) selecting this option. Cinematography was the second most valued element, chosen by 177 participants (56.2%), and followed closely by music ($n = 161$; 51.1%).

In contrast, setting was valued by 151 participants (47.9%), indicating a lower emphasis on the importance of the physical background within FFs. The least valued element was acting, selected by only 76 participants (24.1%).

If we consider the participants' relationship with fashion, we can see that:

- Professionals and/or students are the ones who most value cinematography ($n = 85$; 48.0%), followed by heavy consumers ($n = 58$; 32.8%) and light consumers ($n = 34$; 19.2%).
- Similar distribution was found for costume design, being valued by 97 of the participating professionals and/or students (47.3%), by 77 of the heavy consumers (37.6%), and by 31 light consumers (15.1%).
- Setting was more valued by professionals and/or students ($n = 71$; 47.0%), followed by heavy consumers ($n = 53$; 35.1%), and light consumers ($n = 27$; 17.9%).
- Music was also more valued by professionals and/or students ($n = 73$; 45.3%), followed by heavy consumers ($n = 55$; 34.2%), and light consumers ($n = 33$; 20.5%).
- Finally, and aligned with the previous ones, acting was also more valued by professionals and/or students ($n = 36$; 47.4%), followed by heavy consumers ($n = 24$; 31.6%); and light consumers ($n = 16$; 21.0%).

4.1.1. Pearson's correlations

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationships among the variables: (1) perceived capability of FFs for transmitting brand identity and values; (2) vision of the integration of FFs in brand communication strategies; (3) role of FFs in brand narrative building; and (4) perception of FFs' role in brand visibility and recognition. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the participants' perception of FFs as vehicles for brand identity and values and their valuation of their integration in brand communication strategies ($r = .535$, $p < .001$). Additionally, FFs perceived as ways of transmitting brand identity and values were also significantly correlated with the individual's notion of their role in building the brand narrative ($r = .514$, $p < .001$).

A significant positive correlation was also observed between the integration of FFs in the brand communication strategies and their narrative role in the brand ($r = .470$, $p < .001$), indicating a strong association between these two variables.

The other pairs of variables did not register significant correlations, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson correlation matrix between perceived brand communication dimensions.

Variable(s)	Identity and Values	Integration	Brand Narrative	Visibility and Recognition
Identity and Values	–	.535**	.514**	.109
Integration	.535**	–	.470**	.105
Brand Narrative	.514**	.470**	–	.112*
Visibility and Recognition	.109	.105	.112*	–

Source: Author's elaboration based on survey data (2025).

Notes. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$. Identity and Values = perceived ability of FFs to transmit brand identity and values; Integration = integration of FFs in brand communication strategies; Brand Narrative = role of FFs in brand storytelling; Visibility and Recognition = contribution of FFs to brand visibility and recognition.

4.1.2. *Multivariate analysis of variance*

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the effect of the individual's relationship with fashion, through the categories 'light consumer', 'heavy consumer', and 'professional and/or student', on their composite perception of the communicational power of FFs. The assumptions of MANOVA were tested before analysis.

- (1) Normality: The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to assess multivariate normality. The results indicated a violation of the normality assumption, Shapiro-Wilk = 0.883, $p < .001$, suggesting that the data are generally not distributed across groups.
- (2) Homogeneity of Variance-Covariance Matrices: Box's M test was used to assess the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices. The results, $\chi^2 (12) = 31.108$, $p = 0.002$, indicated a violation of this assumption.
- (3) Multicollinearity: An exploration of correlations between the dependent variables indicated that they were significantly correlated, but not above 80% (Table 1), which is the standard rule to avoid multicollinearity and/or singularity issues with the dependent variables (Grice and Iwasaki 2007).

Given the assumption check results, we chose to report Pillai's Trace as it is more robust to violations of assumptions, particularly when there is unequal group covariance and non-normal data (Finch 2006).

Afterwards, a MANOVA was conducted to determine the effect of the individual's relationship with fashion on the combination of: (1) perceived capability of FFs for transmitting brand identity and values; (2) vision of the integration of FFs in brand communication strategies, and (3) role of FFs in brand narrative building. The multivariate tests were examined to evaluate the overall effect. The multivariate Pillai's Trace found a significant influence of audience segmentation on the combined dependent variables (Pillai's Trace = 0.072, $F(6, 628) = 3.904$, $p < .001$). These findings support the hypothesis that audience profile influences the perceived effectiveness of fashion films in conveying brand identity and emotional appeal. The Univariate Analysis (ANOVA) revealed significant differences in the perception of FFs' capability to transmit brand identity and values among individuals with different relationships with fashion, $F(2, 315) = 9.69$, $p < .001$. The multiple comparison of means, using Games-Howell's post hoc test, indicated that professionals and students have a better perception of FFs as capable of transmit a brand identity and values ($M = 4.60$; $SD = 0.64$) than light consumers ($M = 4.13$; $SD = 0.77$), $MD = -0.469$, $SE = 0.112$, $t(93.957) = -4.173$, $p < .001$. Similarly, professionals and students showed significantly better perceptions than heavy consumers ($M = 4.38$; $SD = 0.78$), $MD = -0.228$, $SE = 0.091$, $t(210.681) = -2.504$, $p = .035$.

ANOVA revealed significant differences in group visions of the integration of FFs in brand communication strategies, $F(2, 315) = 3.45$, $p = .033$. Regarding the multiple comparison of means, Games-Howell's post hoc test, professionals and students have statistically significant better vision of the integration of FFs in brand communication strategies ($M = 4.53$; $SD = 0.61$), than light consumers ($M = 4.26$; $SD = 0.69$), $MD = -0.268$, $SE = 0.102$, $t(99.64) = -2.62$, $p = .027$. No further statistical differences were found for this variable.

Finally, ANOVA also demonstrated significant differences in the individuals' notions of the role of FFs in brand narrative building, $F(2,315) = 7.76, p < .001$. The multiple comparison of means, using Games-Howell's post hoc test, indicated that professionals and students have statistically significant higher perception of the role of FFs in the brand narrative ($M = 4.59; SD = 0.60$) than light consumers ($M = 4.19; SD = 0.77$), $MD = -0.406, SE = 0.111, t(89.323) = -3.657, p = .001$.

4.2. Exploratory analysis: purchase intent

Although not part of the initial hypotheses, an exploratory analysis was conducted to examine whether exposure to a fashion film would influence participants' purchase intent compared to a static image.

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare purchase intent between the experimental group (fashion film) and the control group (static image). The fashion film group reported slightly higher purchase intent ($M = 3.74, SD = 0.91$) than the static image group ($M = 3.51, SD = 0.95$), but this difference was not statistically significant, $t(316) = 1.89, p = .060$.

The difference between groups was not statistically significant ($p = 0.060$). Although the values suggest a potentially relevant pattern, studies with greater statistical power and longitudinal designs will be needed to evaluate behavioral effects.

5. Discussion

The overall objective of this study was to examine how FFs function as brand communication tools, focusing on two central aspects: (1) how audiences with different levels of engagement with fashion value visual elements such as costume design and cinematography; and (2) how this valuation is associated with the perceived effectiveness of these elements in conveying brand identity.

Although the results confirm the value placed on visual elements by fashion professionals and students, it is important to emphasize the lack of a statistically significant impact on purchase intention. This finding may reflect a dissociation between aesthetic engagement and consumer behavior, suggesting that fashion films, while effective in building brand symbolism, do not necessarily function as a direct stimulus to purchase. This result aligns with the thinking of Chang and Suh (2017), who also observed that although FFs evoke strong emotional and symbolic responses, their influence on immediate purchase behavior is limited. Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele (2019) similarly argue that FFs play a more critical role in building long-term brand memory and symbolic value than in activating sales. This ambiguity highlights a more cultural and identity-building function of these films, underscoring the role of fashion films as narrative content, rather than merely as promotional instruments.

From a sociocultural perspective, the results can be interpreted in terms of the participants' cultural backgrounds: audiences with greater visual literacy (professionals and students) tend to decode the aesthetic and symbolic codes of fashion films more easily, which may explain their differing values of the analyzed elements.

This interpretation is supported by Workman and Freeburg (2010), who demonstrated that individuals with greater involvement with fashion are more likely to perceive and attribute symbolic meaning to fashion-related stimuli. Similarly, Ko, Costello, and Taylor (2019) emphasize that experience with fashion influences how visual content is processed and internalized emotionally.

Thus, fashion films function as meaning-makers, whose impact depends on each audience's relationship with fashion, a highly relevant piece of information for brands seeking to connect with different consumer segments.

The results support Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that fashion students and professionals consistently attribute greater value to costume design and cinematography than casual consumers. Costume design stood out as the most valued visual element overall, aligning with previous literature that highlights costume design as a fundamental visual element for storytelling.

Wang (2024) argues that costumes in FFs are a narrative tool that embodies brand values. Muller (2016) argues that costumes in FFs function as a semiotic language, reinforcing brand identity and stimulating emotional connection, an idea supported by this research.

Cinematography was the second most frequently mentioned element, reflecting a preference for visual aesthetics among more fashion-savvy audiences. This reinforces Rees-Roberts's (2018) view that FFs adopt cinematic codes from auteur cinema to create immersive experiences. According to Yusuf (2023), it is this blend of cinematic style and emotional depth that allows FFs to engage consumers more deeply, particularly among more fashion-savvy audiences.

The results also confirmed H2, revealing a significant positive correlation between the value attributed to visual elements and the perceived ability of the fashion film to express brand identity. This suggests that the more a consumer appreciates the visual narrative, the more likely they are to interpret the film as an authentic and effective representation of the brand.

These results are consistent with the theoretical models of narrative branding proposed by Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote (2016), which emphasize the power of coherent visual narratives in constructing brand meaning. They also align with Kim and Sullivan (2019), who demonstrate that visual storytelling in FFs improves brand perception by aligning with emotional branding strategies.

These findings underscore the importance of audience segmentation in fashion communication strategies and suggest that visual elements play a significant role in shaping interpretation.

These insights offer empirical evidence to support the notion that FFs, when rich in cinematic details and costumes, are valuable sources of symbolic meaning. Their effectiveness lies in their artistic execution, as well as in the viewer's ability to decode their visual language, an ability that appears to increase with professional or academic involvement in the fashion industry.

These results can also be interpreted in consideration of Narrative Transportation theory (Green and Appel 2024), which suggests that emotional engagement with a coherent visual narrative reinforces the symbolic connection with the brand, even if it does not produce immediate behavioral effects.

This theory has been widely applied to brands' audiovisual content, supporting the idea that immersion enhances symbolic processing. In the context of fashion films, Yusuf (2023) also found that immersion through sound and image significantly increases brand affinity.

Similarly, the Uses and Gratifications theory (Rehman, 2023) helps us understand how different audiences attribute distinct meanings to visual stimuli, with some seeking aesthetic inspiration and symbolic belonging, while others seek a sensory or emotional experience. Furthermore, the 'Jobs to Be Done' framework (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2016) reinforces the notion that FFs are 'shrunk' by consumers to satisfy emotional, symbolic, or aspirational needs, explaining why those more invested in the fashion attribute value this content more.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies provide strong support for the findings of this study, highlighting the importance of tailoring FFs to specific audience profiles, particularly those with advanced visual literacy and symbolic awareness.

The results contribute to discussions in marketing communications. The segmentation found informs Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) strategies, allowing the alignment of audiovisual narratives with multichannel plans (social media, website, events). The findings support the integration of fashion films into transmedia branding strategies, in which distinct content is cohesively articulated across different platforms, ensuring symbolic consistency. Theoretically, the study refines models of brand storytelling and symbolic communication by empirically demonstrating that valuing costumes and cinematography enhances perceptions of authenticity and brand identity, particularly among more visually literate audiences, thereby deepening the discussion on consumer brand relationships.

6. Conclusion and implications for fashion marketing and management

This study aimed to investigate how FFs are perceived by different audience segments in terms of two fundamental visual elements (costume design and cinematography) and how these elements influence the perception of brand identity. The results demonstrate that fashion students and professionals consistently value these visual components more than casual consumers, and that this valuation is positively correlated with the perceived effectiveness of brand communication through visual narrative (Kim and Sullivan 2019; Wang 2024).

These results suggest that FFs, when carefully crafted, can serve as another highly relevant medium for expressing and reinforcing brand identity. Visual elements serve to activate consumer perception and interpretation. Costumes and cinematography, in particular, function as symbolic languages that communicate aesthetic codes, emotional tone, and cultural positioning (Barnard 2014; Muller 2016).

From a strategic perspective, fashion brands should consider adapting the content of their FFs to reach audiences with a more developed visual aesthetic, such as fashion professionals and students, while maintaining the narrative clarity that is reflected in broader consumer segments. This also highlights the need for more informed approaches in the field of research to produce FFs, based on audience analysis and visual semiotics (Rees-Roberts 2018).

In short, FFs are intended to be aesthetic experiences that have repercussions on brand strategy. Understanding how different audience groups interpret their visual language is fundamental to compelling brand storytelling in a saturated, image-driven media landscape.

These findings provide practical guidance for brand managers and content creators seeking to maximize the impact of fashion films on brand identity, particularly among more fashion-savvy audiences.

In practical terms, the results support the incorporation of fashion films as a fundamental tool in IMC and transmedia content, reinforcing brand identity consistently across channels. The difference in valuation across segments suggests adapting the visual grammar (rhythm, aesthetic codes, symbolic density) for audiences with greater aesthetic and cultural literacy in fashion, without losing narrative clarity for broad audiences. Thus, the study offers evidence applicable to cross-platform planning and contributes to marketing communications literature by positioning fashion films as strategic identity content.

6.1. Limitations and future directions

This study also comes with several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, future studies should broaden the scope of fashion films to encompass a greater stylistic, narrative, and cultural variety. Second, research should employ stratified sample approaches and account for other demographics, such as age, education, and cultural background, to enhance the generalizability and analytical robustness of the findings.

Third, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants' stated preferences may not fully reflect their actual behaviour or engagement with FFs. Finally, in methodological terms, the study focused on a limited set of visual elements, specifically costume design and cinematography, within established frameworks (Kim 2020; Wang 2024). Future research should employ more robust measurement instruments, incorporating multi-item scales for each construct and conducting thorough pre-validation procedures to ensure accuracy.

Experimental projects involving real-time measures of attention and emotional engagement could offer more robust evidence of the impact of fashion films.

It is also pertinent to investigate emerging platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and immersive environments (e.g., VR), which should be explored as new spaces for the dissemination and reception of FFs.

Such approaches would contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of FFs as a dynamic medium for brand communication and symbolic expression.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to privacy and ethical restrictions, the data are not publicly available.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Ethics statement

All participants provided informed, anonymous, and voluntary consent before beginning the questionnaire. The study did not involve sensitive data or pose any risk. According to Lusófona University regulations, research based on anonymous and voluntary surveys does not require formal approval by an ethics committee. The study complied with the ethical standards for social science and humanities research established by Taylor & Francis.

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Appendix A – Summary of relevant literature

This appendix summarises the main academic and professional contributions that shaped the theoretical framework of the study *Screen Style: Visual Elements and Brand Identity in Fashion Films*. The table is organised according to thematic and analytical logic, rather than purely chronological or alphabetical order. The studies are grouped according to their conceptual relevance to the research objectives: beginning with the fundamental works that define fashion film as a hybrid genre; progressing through investigations into audience perception, emotional engagement, and visual narrative; and concluding with theoretical models related to brand identity, luxury communication, and narrative persuasion. This structure allows for a clearer understanding of how different strands of research converge to inform the analytical model of the present study. The present study facilitates a clearer understanding of how different strands of research converge to inform the analytical model of the present study, beginning with the fundamental works that define fashion film as a hybrid genre, and, beginning with the fundamental works that define fashion film as a hybrid genre, progressing through investigations into audience perception, emotional engagement, and visual narrative.

Author(s) and year	Core Theme/Contribution	Fashion Film/Brand Focus	Context/Relevance to the present study
Uhlirova (2013)	Conceptual exploration of fashion films as an artistic and communicative form.	Various/ Experimental films	Established FF as a hybrid genre between cinema and fashion communication.
Buffo (2017)	Visual narrative and aesthetic strategies in FFs.	Various	Identified narrative and sensory patterns that shape viewer immersion.
Chang and Suh (2017)	Consumer emotional response to FFs.	N/A	Demonstration of symbolic and emotional involvement through audiovisual narratives.
Kim and Sullivan (2019)	Relationship between sound, image, and brand perception.	Various FFs	Provided scales to measure audiovisual engagement in fashion contexts.
Ko, Costello, and Taylor (2019)	Luxury branding and digital storytelling.	Luxury fashion brands	Linked symbolic communication with consumer loyalty and the online experience.
Park, Hyun, and Thavisay (2021)	Digital communication and dissemination of content through FFs.	Multiple brands	Demonstrated the integration of FFs into omnichannel marketing strategies.
Pizzetti, Gatti, and Seele (2019)	Symbolic value and purchasing behaviour in exposure to FF.	N/A	Narrative persuasion connected to memory and behavioural intention.
Wang (2024)	Costume design as narrative device	Haute couture FFs	Framed costume as a semiotic carrier of identity and meaning.
Muller (2016)	Costumes and brand recognition in film advertising.	Various	Proven semiotic coding of fashion identity through wardrobe.
Yusuf (2023)	Narrative depth and emotional connection in FFs.	Miu, Miu, others	Analysed the audiovisual immersion and coherence of the brand narrative.
Lopes, Sandes, and Damásio (2024)	Speculative Design and FF innovation	Miu Miu, others	Provided the conceptual and methodological basis for the speculative framework of this study.
Barnard (2014)	Semiotics and meaning in fashion communication.	N/A	Provided theoretical foundations for the interpretation of visual symbolism.

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(Continued).

Author(s) and year	Core Theme/Contribution	Fashion Film/Brand Focus	Context/Relevance to the present study
Kapferer (2012)	Luxury brand identity and consistency of meaning.	Luxury fashion brands	Brand narrative connected to identity management and symbolic capital.
Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote (2016)	Narrative branding and consistency across platforms.	N/A	Supported integration of FFs within IMC and transmedia branding models.
Hines and Bruce (2007)	Fashion Marketing and consumer culture	N/A	Provided a macroeconomic understanding of branding and trend diffusion.
Green and Appel (2024)	Narrative Transportation Theory	General media context	Explained the mechanisms of emotional immersion and symbolic persuasion applied to FFs.
Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney (2016)	Jobs-to-be-done Framework	Consumer behaviour	Informed segmentation logic underlying the experimental design of the study.
Bhatiasevi (2024)	Theory of uses and gratifications in digital fashion media.	Online FF audiences	Audience motivations and gratifications clarified across all segments.
Workman and Freeburg (2010)	Perceptual differences between fashion audiences.	N/A	Hypothesis supported by the different interpretations among professionals and consumers.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on a review of the literature (2025).

Summary

The literature reviewed collectively demonstrates the growing academic recognition of FF as a strategic and symbolic.

These studies inform the hypotheses and analytical model adopted in Screen Style, particularly about audience segmentation, narrative immersion, and the role of visual elements, costume design, and cinematography in brand identity construction.