A Critical Examination of the Influence of

Digital Culture on Fashion Consumption

Amongst Young People

DESMOND ODIASE

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Manchester Fashion Institute Faculty of Art and Humanities Manchester Metropolitan University

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Contents:

Abstract

Like globalization and urbanization, digital culture has transformed the world. Childhood has not been left behind, and as millions of children are brought into the world, they are immersed into digital culture to the extent that it appears to have become a way of life. This thesis considers the suggestion that childhood consumption has becoming increasingly intensified as a result. The research focuses on the relationship between digital culture and fashion consumption amongst young people, specifically pre-teens (aged 9 - 12), arguing that young people experience of fashion can tell us about how consumption is changing. The importance of focusing on pre-teens is to enrich the research as although consumption amongst young people has intensified, it particularly noticeable within this group. The argument is thus presented that we can better understand this relationship through the lens of pleasure-seeking. The thesis goes on to critically consider how digital culture impacts upon pre-teen consumers' relationship with fashion and it does so through a particular focus on the process of sexualisation, with sexualisation being one of the behavioural patterns through which unconscious participation is imposed as a result of social media. The thesis contends that marketing communications via social media are being utilised to encourage a highly visible sexuality, particularly through fashion goods, with marketers positioning young people and their culture so that it may be sold for monetary gain. The analysis further demonstrates that while in one sense digital fashion consumption liberates young people and potentially offers them a sense of control over their identities, it also intensifies their consumption experience and the ability of consumption to impact upon their lives as a result of their search of pleasure and their fear of being rejected or of not belonging. The research concludes with regulations that could be implemented to regulate advertisers portraying emotive words/images targeted at young people, potential policies for tackling the sexualisation of young people, especially children and recommendations for further research on exploring young people fashion consumption under the lens of pleasure.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand the influence of digital culture on young people and the role it plays in their fashion choices and identity construction. Hence, to achieve the aims of this thesis I will focus on young people as consumers, with a particular focus on the pre-teen group, as it is believed that this will create the foundation needed to understand how young people consume. The fashion industry is one of society's fastest-growing industries, with numerous brands entering the market daily and providing satisfaction to their target consumers. According to the McKinsey Global Fashion Index (2019), the fashion industry is worth over 2.4 trillion dollars presently, making it an attractive investment ground for many entrepreneurs. Fashion is constantly changing and is directly related to lifestyle, class, affordability, and identity (Blumer, 1969). The most immediate information that goes out to the world about one's identity is the look, and fashion is what makes it unique and identifiable (Davis, 2013). Venkatesh et al. (2010) state that clothing and fashion is what reveals the most about an individual's social and cultural identity as it is often used as means to stand out, give a message, and define one's personality. Psychologist's Adam and Galinsky (2012) state that, observations and conclusions can be drawn from the way a person dresses, as it tells a lot about preferences and the attitude of an individual. This is what brands, like Diesel, Levi's, Nike, Dr Martens, Fred Perry amongst many others used to climb the ladder of success: the power to define the identity of the youth, held over by youth itself (Osgerby, 2004). Bennet (2005) defines fashion as a key source through which people shape and position their identities in relation to other people. Today's modern world embodies an ever-changing array of consumer goods and branded messages which change at a highly unpredictable rate. This

dynamic nature gives rise to a degree of competition in various aspects of social life including gender, social politics and fashion; with fashion acting as a part of the expression of identities in a world that continuously changes (Davis, 2013). Hence, in this thesis I will seek to understand the influence of digital culture on fashion consumption and identity construction amongst young people, specifically focusing on pre-teens as consumers.

In the wake of the digital era, worldviews have arguably changed, in that social media brings fashion choices to the consciousness of young people who are said to desire to look like celebrities and online influencers (Moorlock, 2018). With this change comes a demographic of consumers (pre-teens) that had been hitherto largely overlooked by scholars because they were not believed to have any purchasing power. Sancheti and Kamal (2009:5) argue that pre-teens 'compose a multi-billion-dollar market, impacting sales directly and indirectly' and according to Simon (2001) the huge numbers involved show the relevance of this market to entrepreneurs in the fashion industry.

Pre-teens are defined by Blue (2013) as young people between the ages of 9 and 12 years; pre-teens are confident, high-tech and market savvy. From this description, this group is not one to be overlooked as they have a clear knowledge of trends that impact the market and are also able to educate their parents about the new trends, as a result of their tech and market savviness. McNeal (1992) argues that pre-teens should be treated as an important market in their own right – one that is highly influential; given the influence of young people on parental purchases, especially in the fashion industry. It is therefore imperative to ask why this group of consumers have been ignored by stakeholders in the past and what has changed among stakeholders in the fashion industry in order for them to start taking this group more

seriously? One reason advanced by Goodin et al. (2011) is the shift in technology and the evolution of young people's rights; attributes that were lacking in previous years. Now, it is not uncommon for young people to cultivate their unique styles depending on what they see on the television or social media (Goodin et al., 2011). Croghan et al. (2007) observe that pre-teens are such a formidable force in the fashion industry because consumption for them is an identity marker.

Additionally, pre-teens also have a twofold effect, which again makes them a formidable market force: they can make decisions on their personal purchases, and they can also influence the taste of the entire family (Lindstrom, 2004). Hence, it is not surprising that this group has caught the attention of the fashion industry as firms are devising means to lure pre-adolescents and their parents into consuming more fashion products through social networking platforms and recruiting young people to promote brands (Blue, 2013). According to a UK study conducted in 2016 on 2000 parents with children under 12, parents were found to be increasingly influenced by bloggers, vloggers and Instagrammers, with 30% of parents saying they are willing to spend more on clothes if it was endorsed by an online influencer (netimperative, 2016). Additionally, the study found that young celebrities, such as Romeo Beckham play a key role in this purchase decision, through brand partnership, with 25% of parents saying they have bought an item after seeing a celebrity child wearing it. (netimperative, 2016). The evidence of this 'high purchasing ability' explains the shift of attention towards pre-teens as consumers.

Given the above, the focus of this study will be on understanding the level of engagement/interaction of young people with digital culture and the influence it has on them,

so as to understand the role it plays in the way they consume fashion and construct their identity. In order to do this, I will pay particular attention to literature focusing on the concept of pleasure-seeking (through imaginative hedonism) amongst young people, as a contributing factor to the way they consume fashion and construct their identity in this digital age. This is important to this thesis, as although the rise of fashion awareness and the correlation between fashion and identity among young people has generated scholarly interest (Darian, 1998; Boden, 2004; Tiggemann and Slater, 2014), the concept of pleasure-seeking amongst this group has yet to be fully explored.

1.2 Background

While the social theory of consumption and childhood has expanded into different fields, there is a shortage of literature exploring pre-teens as consumer, or as active participants of different consumer subcultures. pre-teen consumption is becoming increasingly significant, both socially and culturally. First, there is the sheer expansion of pre-teen consumer markets (Boden et al., 2004). While scholars have largely failed to study consumption behaviour among pre-teens, firms in the children market have long been interested in consumption trends among children. However, this focus has been limited to specific behaviours such as decision-making between children and parents in fashion purchases (Darian, 1998), while others have focused on recognising the importance of children as a key consumer market worth in its own analysis (Boden et al., 2004).

The literature further points to the broader significance of studying children and pre-teen consumption. Pre-teens are becoming the active targets of marketing, both as active and purposeful consumers, and also, as individuals who are likely to influence the consumption

patterns of others. The evolving role of children as individual agents has long been promoted by the desire of firms to expand their markets and profitability; this is evident with the cradle to grave strategy used by marketers, where the knowledge of cognitive and social development of a child is used as a tool for marketing and obtaining consumers at a young age (Bandura,1986). While children may not be independent actors, these developments suggest that children are not a mere vessel receiving adult input. Such a view is outdated, nowadays young people are influencing adults' decision on fashion consumption and this urged investigations; requiring scholars to reinvent their perspective about young people, both as active doers and knowers. Of course, this view does not deny that young people are influenced by their parents or their social environment but suggests that young people have greater agency and intention during consumption than previously assumed. The concept of digital natives proposed by Prensky (2001) states that because young people have grown up in a technological world, their brain develops differently from those in previous generations. Hence this research aims to combine the insight of fashion studies and the sociology of consumption to explore the concept of digital natives and its relation to aspects of consumer and developmental psychology among young people.

1.3 Value/Contribution

This project aspires to contribute to enrich the existing knowledge on the extent to which digital culture influences fashion consumption amongst young people. In doing so it will make use of a conceptual approach under the lens of pleasure-seeking as a foundation for developing a case on the influence of a particular aspect of digital culture on young people's fashion consumption. Additionally, it will also seek to explore any potential links between the

digital culture consumed by adults around young people and the impact it has on the construction of identity among young people. This is significant because it will help to provide insight on a topic that seeks to fill the current gap in knowledge. More importantly, the findings of this study would act as a potential reference literature for members of the fashion industry and key agents interested in young people's fashion.

1.4 Aim and Objectives:

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between digital culture and young people's fashion consumption, so as to understand what young people's fashion experiences can teach us about how consumption is changing. To achieve this, the following objectives will be met:

- To examine the role of pleasure seeking in influencing the ways in which consumers might use consumption as a means of amplifying their pleasure and happiness.

- To analyse the construction of identity in pre-teens and how the act of consumption has a relevant role in the transition and self-definition of young people since it can be considered as part of their growing process.

- To define digital culture and explore the links between digital culture and the concept of imaginative hedonism (through pleasure-seeking) amongst young people.

- To understand the subsequent impact on the way fashion is consumed and how identity is constructed amongst young people.

☐ To explore how sexualisation is manifested through social media and its relationship to style, self, self-esteem and body image as, sexuality is considered to be one of the significant impacts of digital consumption as a result of pleasure seeking through imagination.

1.5 Methodology Statement

In order to investigate the relationship between digital culture and young people's (specifically pre-teens) fashion consumption behaviour, it is necessary to develop a conceptual framework. In focusing on the pre-teen group, it is because this group is considered to be a dominant force in the fashion industry. Thus, focusing on this group provides the background to produce

a comprehensive review of consumption patterns of young people in a digital age. This dissertation is designed to represent a first step in identifying the key issues and assessing what they might mean for future research: and how young people's consumption might inform our broader understanding of the relationship between consumption and social change. By reviewing multiple data sources, the research will be able to obtain adequate information important in developing theoretical insights into the impact of the digital age on the consumption of fashion products among young people. To ensure that the study retains its objectivity, the outline for this research is structured in a manner that will enable me to obtain an in-depth understanding of the impact of digital culture on by exploring ideas shared in previous related studies. The information collected from these sources will be scrutinised to examine whether there is a shared ideology and how this helps us better understand the topic at hand. The chosen research design is expected to face scepticism on whether to generalize the research findings. However, the research will look to demonstrate that the

information gained from the multiple sources, produces a thorough explanation to the objectives under investigation.

1.5.1 Outline

To achieve the above objective, the following will be covered in the following chapters:

Chapter Two: Consumption, Pleasure Seeking and Belonging, will seek to understand the relationship between pleasure and consumption, so as to determine the role of pleasure seeking in influencing the ways in which consumers might use consumption as a means of amplifying their pleasure and happiness. This will be particularly beneficial to this thesis as it will provide the background on which to analyse young people's consumption patterns and behaviour.

Chapter Three: Pre-teens and Meaning Construction, will propose a discussion on the construction of identity in pre-teens. To approach this issue, I will be analysing several topics such as the role of signs in social life and consumerism as an essential part of human interaction, the construction of "others" for market segmentation and fashion as a form of externalisation of the self through the body. I will focus on understanding the active role of pre-teens in their identity construction, pointing out that the act of consumption has a relevant role in the transition and self-definition of young persons since it can be considered as a part of their growing process.

Chapter Four: Digital Culture, will initially focus on defining what digital culture is, the influence it has on young people and its resulting impact. Thereafter, it will seek to focus on an aspect of digital culture (social media), as it hoped that it will provide a structured narrative

that establishes a link between the use of social media and the concept of imaginative hedonism, and the subsequent impact on the way fashion is consumed and identity is constructed amongst this group. Imaginative hedonism as means through which pleasurable consumption is sought will provide a focal point for this chapter as it is envisioned that building a case using the following three variables: entertainment, familiarity with celebrity and social imaging, in analysing the effect of pleasuring-seeking on these variables, will provide more insight as to its overall contribution towards the impact of fashion consumption and identity among young people. This is because stereotypical representations of fashion are often explored through variables like entertainment, familiarity with celebrity culture and self-imaging. Exploring these variables will enable the attainment of the research goal in this section. With the stereotypical representations abound in the advertisement of fashion items giving the underlying message that ownership would give a particular status, this chapter will seek to establish and understand how stereotyped representation of fashion displayed across digital culture is perceived and constructed by young people.

Chapter Five will discuss the impact of fashion on young people as a result of the digital age. It can be said that the ability of marketers to reach young people and encourage the spirit of consumption has become a major way through which young people are able to construct their identities, therefore it is also important to understand the resulting impact of this. Hence, the need to focus on sexualisation, as it is considered to be one of the significant impacts of digital consumption as a result of pleasure seeking through imagination. Thus, to understand how this speaks about the changing nature of consumption, this chapter will seek to understand how sexualisation is manifested through social media and its relationship to style, self, self-esteem and body image.

In conclusion, the contribution of this thesis is to critically consider the influence of digital culture (under the lens of pleasure) upon young people's consumption patterns with a focus on the pleasure-seeking dimensions of social media use and how this might inform our ongoing understanding of consumption in a rapidly changing world.

CHAPTER TWO

Consumption, Pleasure Seeking and Belonging

2. Introduction

Consumption is a socially complex framework in which people consume services, facilities, and goods that are far beyond their use value (Aytekin et al., 2013). Consumption used to be about utility and goods that had functional value, but more recently, it has been said to be more about the symbolic value of goods, as according to Aytekin et al. (2013), consumption choices result in pleasure, and expectations about pleasure play an important role in taking such decisions. With well-being and happiness being closely attached to the ability to consume more materials as compared to the next person, the consumer society is based on the constant drive to increase perceived needs through marketing communications, cultural patterns and political incentives as well as, all of which ensure that the consumption levels are on a constant high. Consumption satisfies both material and non-material goods, with material goods being important not only for the immediate practical value but also as a result of what they signify to consumers.

In this chapter, I will seek to understand the relationship between pleasure and consumption, so as to determine the role of pleasure-seeking in influencing the ways in which consumers might alter their consumption level to amplify their pleasure and happiness. Also, I will examine previous literature and theories in relation to pleasure-seeking and consumption with the aim of relating it to young people as a section of consumers. In order to meet the objectives mentioned, I will propose a discussion on the subject using theories of sociology

and Consumer Culture Theory and in particular the work of Campbell (1987) Holt (1995) and O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002). Additionally, I will introduce my research context and the chosen group for my study; examining the theories that deal with the marketing and advertising processes in general, but which sometimes also refer to the specific case of young people, as it is envisioned that this will also help to provide an in-depth understanding of the concept of pleasure-seeking in relation to consumption.

2.1 One-Dimensional Culture, Jouissance (Pleasure), and Desire

To begin with, it is important to consider the work of O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) here. In their paper, *Marketing, The Consumer Society and Hedonism,* they state that Marcuse (1964:529), 'view[ed] Western society as characterised by conspicuous consumption, with critical thought overthrown in a "one-dimensional culture" of mass conformity'. Public marketing and the consumption of goods being inseparable from private accumulation and the display of material possession, the one and the other embrace all the aspects of societal members' life and culture; making these aspects homogeneous. So essentially, both the public/private aspects as well as the aspects concerning various forms of pleasure, for example, the pleasure to eat and the pleasure to possess respond to the same principle of possession and consumption. It is interesting that Marcuse (1955) became interested in Freud, and that Marcuse's theory on the one-dimensional man is not dissimilar from the theory of a follower of Freud, Jacques Lacan. Lacan (2004) speaks of a "dimension of the one". The one is intended by Lacan (2004), as a subject who does not take charge of "the other and his significance". He (the individual) does not do so because he is taken in his search for jouissance/pleasure, an unbridled seeking-impulse or drive, which goes wild in a repetitive-obsessive way ("compulsion to repeat"), and which aims at an

individualistic/egoistic pleasure through objects, or through the body of others considered as an object, to be owned. So, the pleasure of "the one" excludes "the significance of the other" for the sole hedonistic, egoistic, narcissistic self-benefit, pleasure, satisfaction and possession. But at the same time, "the one" in search of pleasure never finds true satisfaction in the possession and consumption of objects, rather his or her search always results in disappointment, and for this very reason: compulsive-obsession. Only if the subject considers "the other" as an equal; dignified with importance and respect (and not as a mere object of pleasure), will this subject be able to satisfy what Lacan calls "Desire" - the latter thus being distinct from jouissance/pleasure. Lacan (2004), who has the merit of having analytically clarified the functioning of the human drive, also has a very precise conception of the term "desire". The relevance of Lacan's "desire" to this project is that it provides the foundation on which to build a clear narrative, as to how the pursue of pleasure subsequently translates to consumption.

In light of the clarification on Lacan's "desire", it is important to note that the most common and current sense of "desire" is in fact 'impulse or longing to possess something or someone'. This is in line with the conservative theory of desire outlined by Schroeder (2009: online) as 'desire being a matter of having dispositions to act', while it is important to indicate the latter concept, it would be preferable to use the terms "jouissance/pleasure" or "satisfaction". But it is undeniable that the consumer society, through marketing communications, and in particular through the hedonistic-narcissistic images that forms of marketing communication present, influence an individual's desires. At this point, it is good to specify a fact on which sociologists such as Campbell (1987) Bourdieu, (1984) and Schudson (1984) as well as advertising experts, have dwelt: the fact that human desire and pleasure mainly revolve

around personalised, idealised and emotionalised images of desired objects. During this discussion, I will refer to images and their role in today's consumer society. This is important because, although jouissance/pleasure and desire have been distinctly defined here, it is also important to understand the impact of images in modern society. It is envisioned that this will provide detailed answers as to how pleasure seeking as a result of emotionalised images leads to consumption. This will be discussed in the following section.

2.2 Hedonism: A "Hallmark" of Consumeristic Society, An Image-Based Human Paradigm and Its Link to Imaginative Pleasure Seeking and Desire

To begin, it is important to start by defining the ideology of consumerism. The ideology of consumerism is described as 'set of beliefs and values, integral but not exclusive to the system of capitalist globalization, intended to make people believe that human worth is best ensured, and happiness is best achieved in terms of our consumption and possessions.' (Sklair, 2010: 136). O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) state that, the ideology of consumerism, in particular marketing and advertising is commonly assumed to be responsible for both the hedonistic lifestyle and the materialistic-consumerism stance of society. Adding that, the expression '"consumer society" is used in a pejorative sense, coming from the perception that such a society will inevitably be hedonistic, '…' search[ing] instant gratification' (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002: 525), and focusing on the experiences of material consumption or accumulation and of public visibility of goods. This echoes the views of Ekström and Glans (2010) as they state that consumption functions like a drug in consumer culture; it is an everyday experience that allows us to break up our daily routines while enhancing the moment. On this level, consuming must be viewed less as an alienating force

and more as a self-animating force, which explains its emotional power over the person. Such experiences have become the core of modern human existence and/or identity. For example, the crucial part of posting photos on social media; showing the self as rich, beautiful, powerful, and gratified. In this respect, O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) add that, hedonism-consumerism has gained the reputation of a "modern bogeyman" (believed to be bad or seen as causing problems) and it is being spread through globalization via marketing. The term "marketing" here is defined by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002:525) as 'all the ways used by marketing to tempt the consumer into buying', in other words, the advertising, which is indicated by Schudson (1984:526) as 'celebrating consumption at the expense of other values'. In this context, both the concept of self-gratification and compulsion as advanced by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) are linked to hedonism both in people's minds, and in the images promoted by marketing communications. Moreover, the hedonistic culture and marketing communications seen nowadays is regarded as responsible for self-constructions, like the "dumbing down", the "me-generation", and the "culture of narcissism". In popular discourse, these three instances are conceived as/associated with the idea of an individualistic culture that is characterised by materialism and self-obsession (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). But since the term hedonism can be associated with different theoretical meanings or nuances (psychological hedonism, ethical hedonism, universal and utilitarian hedonism, rationalizing hedonism), it is important to distinguish the above-mentioned theoretical-philosophical hedonism from the most relevant one here, which is narrow hedonism.

Narrow hedonism is important here because it is considered to be the hallmark of today's society with the idea of self-gratification, self-obsession and excessive consumption all being

linked to it (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). According to Ekström and Glans (2010), the hyperconsumer is no longer preoccupied with status, but rather with revitalising his life; he refuses to tolerate dead time and desires to continuously and perpetually experience new feelings through new things. Concerning this subject, Bourdieu (1984:527) underlined the role played by 'emotive words and images', that are used by sellers according to 'the fun ethic of modern-day society'. Bourdieu (1984) discusses the essential role played by images in the dynamics of desire, dynamics evidently intertwined or integrated with historical socio-economic processes, in other words, the fun ethic has here replaced both the ethic of hard work and the importance of product substance, to the advantage of the hedonistic image. Something not too dissimilar to this, is the romantic ethic postulated by Campbell (1987), where he discusses romanticism and its links to advertising and modern hedonistic practices. In his book, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism,* Campbell (1987:1), begins with a definition, of the adjective "romantic": 'marked by or suggestive of or given to romance; imaginative, remote from experience, visionary, and (related to literary or artistic method) preferring grandeur, or passion or irregular beauty to finish and proportion'. Campbell (1987) suggests that the term "romantic", taken in a broader sense, also refers to what is exotic and idealised. On the opposite pole of a "romantic life", there are "dull and prosaic matters" (Campbell, 1987:1) such as economic conduct; the everyday actions of selecting, purchasing and using goods and services. However, there is one important occurrence that links the two together, and that is advertising (Campbell, 1987). Advertising, on one hand, present stories, images and texts which are far from common experience and imaginative, suggesting passions and grandeur, briefly embracing the topic of "romance"; and on the other hand, advertising has the non-romantic purpose to make people

consume goods and services. So, it can be said that in advertising, the "romantic" materialism of culture is expressed.

As academics and literary critics have underlined, before the creation of a contemporary advertisement, 'the "romantic" ingredient in [Western] culture '…' had a crucial part to play' (Campbell, 1987:2). But for Campbell (1987:2-6), it could even be argued that 'Romanticism itself played a critical role in facilitating the industrial revolution and, therefore, the character of the modern economy', and that 'a "romantic ethic" work[ed] to promote the 'spirit of consumerism'. In this regard, Campbell's modern hedonism becomes relevant here. Campbell (1987) observes that the current economy is replacing old-fashioned sensory pleasure with imaginative hedonism. He argues that consumption is all in the mind of the consumer, in the form of fantasy and day dreaming: creating mental figures, which gives rise to the illusion of pleasure. Here, it is not the purchasing of products that elicits pleasure but fantasies of better lifestyles and exotic experiences. Even if a person knows that it is only a virtual, mental, unreal and false representation, the person feels this representation as being true: this can be because imagining situations or events usually stimulate actual emotional experiences, and precisely these emotional experiences are created from advertising. So briefly for Campbell (1987:528) 'the pleasures of consumption reside in imagination'.

Additionally, according to Schudson's (1984) analysis and as O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) also suggest, consumption and marketing, or consumption as influenced by marketing through symbolic images (even more than in the iconic slogans or words) 'provid[ing] an alibi for self-indulgence '…' [for] assuag[ing] guilt, through reinterpretation '…' of acquired rules '…' [and/or of] authority figures such as parents'

(O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002: 526). Belk, et al. (2003:326) in their article, *The Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion,* further echo Campbell's sentiments on modern consumerism: that consumers desire and fantasise about certain goods on a daily basis. Here, desire is defined as 'a powerful cyclic emotion that is both discomforting and pleasurable'. By this definition, their view concurs with the views of materialism researchers, James Borroughs and Aric Rindfleisch, who talk about consumers experiencing desire. They state that 'Telling people to be less materialistic is like telling people that they should not enjoy sex or eat fatty foods. People can learn to control their impulses, but this does not remove the underlying desires' (Awanis, 2018:online). Ekström and Glans (2010) state that consumer desire must be regarded as a more or less successful means of avoiding or escaping the monotony of daily existence. When he or she buys new items, he expresses his reluctance to accept the objectification of himself and of routine by striving to heighten and re-intensify every living moment. This consumer desire is born of various avenues which include and are not limited to advertisements, daydreams, and everyday conversations.

Advertising, as argued by Campbell (1987) and Bourdieu (1984), goes a long way in appealing to the emotions of a consumer whereby the latter is convinced that acquiring that particular object will make them happier, elevate their status, or even fulfil an existing desire. This desire could also define where an individual belongs. That is, through an individual's choice of consumption, their identity can be revealed. However, as discussed earlier, this desire does not guarantee satisfaction with the product once and if it is attained or as Campbell (1987:90) sums it up, 'It is not our wants but wanting that is insatiable'.

2.3 Consumption and Consumer Society

This section will be looking at the four levels of consumption, as advanced by Holt (1995). This will help in providing a structured narrative that shows the link between Holt's (1995) analysis of how consumers consume, Campbell's (1987) imaginative hedonism and subsequently Belk, et al's (2003) discussion of the fire of desire. It is envisioned these studies will help better inform the thesis by creating a narrative that enables us to answer the research objective: understanding the relationship between pleasure and consumption, as so to determine the role of pleasure-seeking in influencing the ways in which consumers might alter their consumption level to amplify their pleasure and happiness

As discussed above, consumption is no longer a question of utility but also, the well-being of the consumer. Holt (1995) in his article, *Consumers Consume: A Typology of Consumption Practices*, poses a very striking question about what exactly it is that people do when they consume. Herein, a universal truth is brought to the fore and that is that the consumption of a similar product or service varies from one individual to the next or from one group to another. Behavioural theory proposes four levels of consumption, which include: consuming as experience, consuming as integration, consuming as classification, and finally as play (Holt, 1995). To begin with, consumption as experience is a metaphor that stands for the subjective, emotional reactions the consumers have towards certain consumption goods. Here, consumption can be experienced or appreciated in two ways, positively and negatively. These emotions signal to the consumer if they are satisfied with their choice of products or not. An experiential view through the work of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) looks at consumption as a pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun: fantasy playing a big role in modern consumption in that it connects to desires, but this desire does not always materialise.

The second metaphor, consuming as integration refers to how a valued product can stamp one's identity, for example, a particular piece of jewellery could go a long way in communicating the identity of the wearer; who they are and often what they believe in. Consumers attach meanings to their possessions and can often treat them as extensions of who they are, either consciously or unconsciously. For example, a carpenter can perceive his tools as an extension of himself, as he needs these tools to perform his job, hence it becomes a part of his identity (Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). This goes hand in hand with James's (1890:292) observation that, 'A man's Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down-not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all'. Hence, consumption as integration is seen as revolving around the concepts of symbolic, ritual, and sacred consumption, which all relate to the meaning placed behind the act of consuming a good or service. In the face of modernity, these types of consumption are gaining popularity and consumers are likely to feel attached to certain products. In search of superiority, consumers go for artefacts that portray a special message both to them internally and to those around them. For example, some individuals might well feel attached to a particular item of clothing. This message varies greatly however, from one consumer to the other.

Thirdly, consuming as classification is the use of consumer goods to categorise oneself in relation to the relevant other. Material objects reveal an individual's definition of who they

are, were, or wish to become. This is advocated in the case of conspicuous consumption and a good example here is the ownership of luxury goods such as vehicles, elegant homes, attendance at prestigious educational institutions and leisure time activities. Consuming as classification brings together people of the same means (those that can afford similar goods or possess similar preferences). In other words, this way a consumer can communicate to the larger society where they fit in.

The fourth dimension of consumption is consuming as play. This refers to when consumers use consumption objects as a way to interact with other consumers besides just directing engaging with the object (Holts, 1995). For example, football fans making use of experiental practices like chanting and singing to entertain each other and to demonstrate their allegiance during a game. Consumers are increasingly engaging in playful consumption as a result of the focus on symbolic, emotive, and aesthetic dimensions of consumer behaviour. This raises the question of intrinsic motivation which is a drive coming from within, that urges a person to take part in a particular activity simply because it exudes pleasure. From the above discussion, it is evident that Holt's (1995) thoughts on consumption go beyond the utilitarian relationship between a product and consumer. With the rise of hedonic consumerism (consumer behaviour relating to the senses, fantasy, and emotive aspects) concepts such as pleasure and desire have been introduced to this phenomenon, whereby pleasure and consumption are becoming more synonymous, in that pleasure-seeking is an integral part of the consumer society today, as is evident from the above discussion.

2.4 21st Century Young/Adolescent: Proposal and Conclusion

In society today, it is well known that adolescence constitutes a period of particular rebellion, during which young people try to assert their autonomy and identity against parental figures. If such a datum can be deduced from common sense or opinion, a more scientific interpretation of adolescence can be provided by psychoanalysis. So, in order to introduce my research context and chosen group for study, as mentioned in my introduction, this section will briefly focus on some considerations elaborated by the post-Kleinian psychoanalyst Meltzer (1973). At the same time, in order not to limit this discourse to a univocal psychoanalytic perspective, it will be integrated with some references to Maslow's (1943) pyramid of needs, which seems to describe some of the fundamental desires and needs of today's young people as well as adolescents, at which point I will proceed to my conclusion. Meltzer (1973) states that the adolescence is, especially in its initial phase, a period characterised by the self's division and therefore by identity oscillation and confusion about one's own body. According to the psychoanalyst, these personality problems are partially solved by the adolescent by taking refuge in group life. It is precisely group life that seems to satisfy the two types of psychological needs at the centre of Maslow's pyramid: those of belongingness and love (which are satisfied in relationships of friendship and intimacy), and those of esteem (prestige and feeling of accomplishment outlined within the group to which the adolescent belongs).

Yet it can be argued that for today's young people who are apparently increasingly lost in the face of the complexity of globalized and consumerist society, the feeling of personal accomplishment within a group is guaranteed, exclusively and uniquely, by attitudes that can be considered to be hedonistic. For example, the fact they show images of themselves and

their lives on social media. Such a life can be evaluated as centred on both the importance of aesthetics and possession, and the willingness to "ritualise" their more exclusive or even intimate experiences. In doing so, they more or less make implicit an unconscious hope that would earn/obtain them the recognition and the desire of the other. Hence, it can be said that only on the condition of appearing as aesthetically well cared and desirable, therefore only by conformity to the dominant stereotypes, young people can be and feel accepted into/by the group. In the most malleable minds and identities of young people, the compulsive desire to possess/consume goods are inflamed; imagination repeatedly retraces the paths of desire and the fixation on advertising images brings to the internalisation of the latter. But the more stereotypical images of advertising are "romantic", in the sense (assumed by Campbell, 1987) of being far from real life, the more they push young people towards an unreal and idealised image of themselves.

The greater extent to which young people "attach" themselves and identify with the images promoted by mass media the more these images can influence them. Precisely because they are unrealistic and what they expect consumption to achieve is mostly unrealisable, even when one has bought the product/service, he or she can end up determining in their social group both frustration of their desires and insecurity or confusion about their identity. It is because the same personality and existence are reduced to a mere image, which is itself devoid of inner consistency and which is dictated and imposed by the narcissistic "other" of the consumer society. So young people would be stuck in a vicious circle (of constant desire, leading to a "compulsion to repeat") that does not seem to be easily broken. The vicious circle could perhaps be broken if young people would distance themselves from the figure of the narcissistic other, and would take, as a reference image of their identity and relationality, a

new double image. On one side, the present and future (possible) image of themselves, considered as subjects to be known and cared for inwardly; on the other side, the image of the other, elevated to a human subject, worthy of respect, and removed from the status of merchandised and commodified object.

Given that this thesis seeks to understand the influence of digital culture on young people's consumption and identity construction, the above chapter has provided a foundation on which to explore how pleasure-seeking through consumption discussed above is influenced by digital culture. Hence, to meet this objective, it will be important to use the concept of pleasure-seeking (through imaginative hedonism) as a focal point in order to discuss how young people consume fashion and construct their identity in this digital age. However, before going in this direction, I want to turn attention to the construction of identity in young people. Exploring the construction of "others" for market segmentation will enable us to understand how fashion is used as a form of externalisation of the self through the body. The importance of this to this thesis is that it provides the basis on which to understand how young people's subsequently construct their identity in this digital age via fashion consumption.

CHAPTER THREE

Pre-teens and the Construction of Meaning

3. Introduction

How is fashion related to "meaning" and how can "meaning" be comprehended? Fashion is arguably primarily a form of consumption, and consumption is a meaningful activity (Wattanasuwan, 2005). All consumption can be said to hold some form of expressive meaning; moreover, people actively build their self-creation projects by incorporating the meanings they aspire to externalise while struggling against those they find undesirable (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Holt (1997) argues that consumers acquire and use products as a means of aligning their sense of self and identity with the meaning implanted in that product. This concurs with the views of McCracken (1986:79) who states that through factors such as possession, exchange and grooming, products become used by consumers to create new symbolic meanings. For example, activities like 'cleaning, discussing, comparing, reflecting and showing off', all under the umbrella of the "possession rituals of goods" which allow consumers to transfer cultural meaning from products (they previously claimed as their own) into their lives and sense of self (McCracken,1986; Schiele and Hughes, 2013). The previous idea implies that people share with others the comprehension of the meanings behind objects and practices; otherwise, it would not be necessary to try to project it in the form of, for example, selecting a set of clothes. This is important to this project because it shows how "meaning" leads to the creation of "the self" via consumption, which is envisioned will help in building the narrative in understanding how fashion is used as a form of externalisation of the self through the body.

Consumption represents a significant aspect of meaningful practice in everyday life; nonetheless, consumption is not only used to create and reassure the self but also to locate the self in society (Wattanasuwan, 2005). The products people consume, the activities they undertake, their philosophies and beliefs speak about who they are and whom it is they identify with (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Simultaneously, in the process of self-definition, people also build the symbolic meanings that differentiate them from the other. The pursuit of symbolic meaning to attach the self-image includes what people do not desire near them; not to have is also, to be (Wattanasuwan, 2005). As a person grows, they enter into a cycle of consumption and consumption resistance. This fight between what they consider the old self and the new desired self is manifested through fashion. Furthermore, the body is the one symbolic space to project an individual's "battle" to others in order to pull them close or push them away.

The process of self-definition and the cycle of consumption and resistance can be found through the body as the most observable form of expression. People consume a large number of products to achieve a body that matches their own self-concept. More importantly, the body is the ultimate symbolic site for socialisation (Wattanasuwan, 2005). 'It can be seen as a visual representation of a reflected, mental, visionary and physical identity,' with some authors referring to it as the body-self (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013:955). Material possession holds the capacity to keep narratives of life going. They are the manifestation of the symbols and meaning embraced in self-creation projects, with symbolic consumption being used to obtain desirable connections with others (Davis, 2013). The processes and cycles previously described represent a continuum in human lives; however, I will be focusing on the particular

moment where they became relevant to people's identity construction: tweenhood (between the ages of 9 and 12). To approach this, I will focus on understanding the active role of pre-teens in their identity construction, pointing out that the act of consumption has a relevant role in the transition and self-definition of young persons since it can be considered as a part of their growing process.

3.1 Pre-teens as Active Agents in Meaning Construction

Zaslow (2009:36) states that 'We are not free to create any identity we select but rather one that reflects the reality of our material conditions and the ideologies in which we come to know the self. Individuals are neither fully autonomous nor living scripted lives. Rather, individuals negotiate identities in dialogue with ideologies, social positions, and cultural ideologies. Young people are no exception'.

In the marketing field, the term pre-teens is often used to describe young people between their childhood and teenage years according to their consumption activities (Macdonald, 2014). During the pre-teen years, these young people start to show more interest in who they are and whom they want to be (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013), however, they frequently found themselves between adults' partly supported and partly restricted actions. Therefore, this is commonly a part of life where they want and reclaim more autonomy but are still dependent upon adults for basic necessities. As a result, pre-teens must accept adults´ rules and regulations (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013).

Tweenhood is a very particular stage of human life. Society is used to label age culturally (child, pre-teen, teenager), but cultural age and biological age are not the same which means

that young people's behaviour is often judged by adults´ theoretical preconceptions of ageing instead of young people's actual competences (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013). It is the same logic that has led several studies to assume that pre-teens are victims of the market and the media manipulations, and they stand naively and passively in front of consumerism (Malik, 2005).

Nonetheless, studies have presented evidence that pre-teens are agentic in this process, meaning that they purposively negotiate the meanings behind their sense of self through fashion (Macdonald, 2014). There are gender-related differences between girls and boys at this age. Girls are attempting to fashion their sense of femininity, and they find it in the market space for self-construction as young females (Macdonald, 2014). The active pursuit of meaning will not be found in market representation but in their everyday social norms and practices which are driven by their desire to belong.

Recently, scholars have given attention to the new interconnectedness of young girls activities and their desire to belong (Macdonald, 2014). It is in their daily practices and relationships where children negotiate with parents, peers, and themselves the terms of their belongings. Pugh (2009) calls these strategies children´s 'economy of dignity'. Children, especially pre-teens, move from groups to group managing (i.e. selecting) which stories and objects are relevant for each social space (Macdonald, 2014). When choosing a fashion item over another, young girls therefore have no total and passive freedom but make strategic selections tied to social relationships embedded in cultural webs of meanings. In other words, pre-teens use fashion in their pursuit of acceptance. However, what is relevant is to whom they seek acceptance, as pre-teens often select their influences. Furthermore, previous

studies of the pre-teens market influences on girls fail to notice that a style is a powerful tool for them to control how they are seen and, of course, how they perceive themselves (Macdonald, 2014).

3.2 Identity Construction Amongst Pre-teens

Given the significance of establishing a link between how pre-teens consume fashion and construct their identities, this section will seek to define what identity is, propose a discussion on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, looking at pre-teens in particular and then establish the link between identity development and peer group culture. Taking these steps, will ensure this section provides a comprehensive discussion on the issue at hand.

3.2.1 Identity

The word identity finds its origins in the Latin language, emerging from the word "Identitas" which means "sameness". The philosophical conceptualisation of the word identity refers to the relationship between a thing or a subject with another, if they express properties that are identical to each other. However, in contrast to the philosophical approach, the sociological notion of identity is associated with a person's self-conceptualisation and social presentation (Olson, 2019). In a generic manner, it is the aspect or quality of a person that makes them unique and separately identifiable from others and thus includes cultural, national and gender identities as contributing factors that help in the process of identity formation. Identity can be limited to a person while to the society of which they are part of, it carries a degree of familiarity and sameness (Billington et al., 1999).

3.2.2 Stages of Psychosocial Development

An individual's identity, despite being influenced by aspects such as race and ethnicity, is not an inherited phenomenon. Prominent psychologist Erik Erikson, in his theory of Psychosocial development, conceptualised identity development as a social process with several stages. Erikson (1956) defines the development of identity as a result of the social experience of a person. These stages identified by include- "Trust vs Mistrust", "Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt", "Initiative vs guilt", "Industry vs Inferiority", "identity vs confusion", "Intimacy vs. Isolation" and "Integrity vs Despair".

In each stage of life, a person experiences a degree of conflict whose resolution that leads to a turning point in their identity development. Erikson (1956) defines these conflicts as opportunities for strength development as it allows the individual to become competent in the respective areas of life. If an individual succeeds in overcoming these conflicts, he or she tends to emerge as a much stronger person; and as such attains psychosocial strength that may serve him or her for the rest of his life. However, the failure to overcome conflict might impede the development of a full sense of self, hence such individuals may lack in developing a strong identity (Jones, 2011). For example, major brain development occurs during the first eight years of childhood, and a lack of play activity-oriented schooling might have a detrimental influence on the child's cognitive development, which is considered to be a critical time for identity formation (Raburu, 2015).

In the context of pre-teens, the "Industry vs Inferiority" phase is the one that is most relevant here, as this stage takes place from the age of 5 to 11 years, which include the early school years. During this stage, children are naturally said to incline towards the development of a sense of pride and confidence in their capabilities. If children are encouraged and appreciated by their guardians and instructors, this sense is further strengthened, while a lack of

encouragement leads to inoculation of self-doubt in their capabilities. Success in this psychosocial developmental stage leads to the development of strength in children referred to as "competence", which allows the child to handle the tasks that are set before them (Child Development, n.d; Cherry, 2019). In the light of this, the next section will seek to define the link between this stage of Erikson's theory and peer group culture and its impact on the construction of identity.

3.2.3 Cultural Identity, Peer Group Culture and Identity Development

The physical, social and psychological attributes of individual contribute to the development of their identity and its components. An individual's identity comprises of various types such as cultural identity, professional identity, ethnic and national identity, gender identity and religious identity that often come into play together during the broader process of identity formulation (Raday and Frances, 2003). In the context of this study, cultural identity becomes more relevant to the pre-teen group as it includes a number of different contributing factors. Chen (2014) defines cultural identity as the sense of belonging to a particular group based on different cultural categories such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, and race. An individual's cultural identity is complex as individuals tend to associate with more than one group (Chen, 2014).

Cultural identity is often attributed to how an individual dresses, talk, what is considered normal and acceptable behaviour, their interaction with a particular environment/group, their belief system and practises on a daily basis (Chen, 2014). This process is termed as acculturation and is defined by Rahiminezhad and Arabian (2018:27) as 'the changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences'.

While identity is unique to every person and people tend to have different attitudes towards the social structure and cultural norms, culture generally succeeds in creating a sense of familiarity amongst people of a community (Gómez-Estern et al., 2010). This is the case with peer group culture and identity formation.

Peer group culture, is often formed by children and includes sets of activities, defined by the perspectives, values and concerns that are collectively produce (Corsaro, 2017). Children in this demographic are apparently more concerned with how they appear to their peers and their identity is moulded by the influence of peer culture presented in schools (Jones, 2011). The importance of this peer group is emphasised by both Dunn (2004) and Weller (2007): both argue that friendships have a profound effect on a child's sense of identity and personal development. Children with friends have stronger social skills and are less likely to experience adjustment problems as a result of school challenges, victimization, bullying. Friends provide social support and help shield children from these challenges (Dunn, 2004; Weller, 2007). The peer group culture here plays an important role in the formulation of identities among children, as discussed in the fourth stage of Erikson's theory, where they attempt to develop a sense of competitiveness with their peers by excelling in different aspects such as academics and sports and seeking out appreciation and confidence through it (McLeod, 2018).

Erikson states that this fourth stage is followed by physical maturity and thus a child integrates and takes all his/her learnings from the previous stage into adulthood (Austrian, 2008). This idea is further reflected in the work of Schaffer (2006) who states that, in their early years, children develop a distinct and simple identity that they maintain throughout their lives. The development of identity, in this context, is highly dependent on peers,

community and the context that they are themselves normally exposed to. With age, horizontal relationships start to take a more significant role in identity formulation as children start to spend more time with peers of the same age group. This peer group culture helps to release the tension during the transition period of coming out of security of family in childhood to adult roles (Corsaro, 2017).

The child is effectively undergoing an identity crisis during this stage, and its resolution results in either a positive outcome i.e., sense of identity and belonging or negative outcome i.e., feelings of confused or as troubled individuals (Austrian, 2008). This peer influence is particularly noticeable amongst young people, who are more anxious as they seek acceptance as group members where intolerance maybe expressed towards outsiders (Jones, 2011; Mcleod, 2018). As Erikson (1956: 93) puts it, 'it is difficult to be tolerant if deep down you are not quite sure that you are a man, that you will ever be attractive, that you will be able to master your drives, that you really know who you are, that you know what you want to be, that you know what you look like to others, and that you will know how to make the right decisions without, once for all, committing yourself to the wrong friend, sexual partner, leader, or career'. The establishment of identity involves an important step of peer group identification, in addition to an individual's family or teachers, where they commit to an idea, a motive or group and let it define them (Austrian, 2008). This point is important in the context of this project as it shows the relationship between pre-teens, peer culture groups and identity formation, which helps in establishing a narrative as to why pre-teens construct their identity in the way they do and how this can link to the way they consume fashion.

Côté (2018:1) states that Erikson influenced our understanding of how an individual evolves, adding that Erikson's 'effect on the research of identity formation is undeniable.' In

agreement with Weigert et al. (1986), Côté (2018:29) argues that Erikson's definition of "identity" is a 'reasonably value-neutral and interdisciplinary term' that has had a significant impact on scientific, philosophical, and political articulations of who and what it means to be a human being (Côté and Levine, 2016). On the same hand, Côté (2018) notes that some scholars have questioned the utility of identity as a concept given the existence of more fundamental concepts such as self-concepts (Hendry and Kloep, 2018; Hill, 1973), while others like Rattansi and Phoenix (2005) have claimed that Erikson had prejudicial ideas, which applied more to men (boys) than to females (girls). Furthermore, while Erikson's theory is often referred to as an evolutionary lifespan theory, these authors believe Erikson's focus on early development overshadows subsequent development in the later adult years. Erickson's views on identity (and identity crisis) have been adapted and applied to modern eras but Côté (2018) claims that recent research on identity crisis has accounted for little of Erikson's work. Côté (2018) adds that Erikson's contribution could be viewed as being weak because it did not sufficiently take into account people's surroundings or context more thoroughly. Erikson's seminal work Identity: Youth and Crisis (1980), according to Schachter and Galliher (2018) has shaped the notion of identity and adolescence in both professional and popular settings. Adding that, Erikson's tendency to over-emphasise the psychosexual aspects of children's development is also widely acknowledged. This is evident in the emphasizes he places on people's background in terms of their social and educational circumstances. Hence Schachter (2018), argues that Erikson attempted to bridge the biological and psychological into a holistic model of human behaviour. To conclude, it is evident from the above that Schachter (2018) and Cote (2018), agree that Erickson views on identity may be biased but his theory has been necessary in understanding how identity formation occurs over the years as they both believe the process of "self making" begins in the preschool years, carries through adolescence, and

is especially important to youth's ability to plan, make decisions, and adjust to aspects of their life

Having earlier clarified the relevance of this section to the thesis, and in order to meet the research objective of understanding how identity is constructed in a digital age, it is important, at this stage to first propose a discussion on the shift from modernity to postmodernity.

3.3 The Shift from Modernity to Post-modernity

Throughout history, identity has taken many meanings and forms, and has evolved with Western Philosophical thinking. Identity was bounded by culture and society in Modernism, while the theory that came later in history apparently freed the individual from the theory previously understood: he or she came to be at the whim of what he or she might want to be from one minute to the next. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the theory of modernism has had a number of critical reviews which led to the emergence of the theory of postmodernism (Lyotard et al.,1984). Modernism was about constructing a coherent world view, a world in which human beings attempted to improve their environment and aspects of life through science and technology; on the other hand, postmodernism defies the theory of modernism, and with the rise of globalization, individuals are free to create their own culture and identity, and therefore do not require the old traditions and institutions to bind them together (Lyotard et al., 1984). Lyotard et al. (1984) further add that post-modernity allows an individual to believe in the only reality he/she experiences and denies that it will be influenced by what others claim to be real. This concurs with the views of Lash (1990:14) on post-modernity, who asserts that, 'there is no such things as reality, only representations of

reality'. In essence, postmodernists believe that there is no universal truth: in this context the individual finds his or her own way.

The advent of postmodernism led to the emergence of individualism, which apparently expanded and opened up limitless opportunity. Individualism essentially supports a person's desires and objectives in life and emphasises independence and self-reliance. The shift from modernism to postmodernism has been beneficial for individualism in this aspect. The postmodern era supports individualism in a deeper manner, as it is associated with not being determined by one set of beliefs, and supports self-creation of an individual's identity, without any restrictions or influences of tradition, societal norms, or external interference. Gare (1995) argues that Individuals have begun giving new meaning to identity by making it a "reflexively organized endeavour" in the postmodern era identity becomes a project, being continuously revised, in accordance with an ever-changing society. Further stating that, postmodern identity, as fluid as it gets, holds a particular significance for the notion of lifestyle (Gare, 1995). As no tradition, religion, or former forms of behaviour and attributes, are required for the formation of the basis of identity, an individual can allegedly be anything irrespective of his or her race or background (Gare, 1995). Identity today is a construct that might be said to follow this principle of postmodernity as Abiala and Hernwall (2013) argue that the internet is primarily responsible for the fluidly seen in post-modern identity. Individuals are aware that identity is a construct that requires constant change, taking into consideration the changes in society, regardless of if they are created by society through the mass media. In this effect, the style of an individual represents a part of society, in which the individual has used fashion like any other consumption good, where a change has occurred according to the current trend in society (Abrudan, 2012). Hence, the nature of identity as a

social construct, shows the influence fashion has in producing individual identity (Abrudan, 2012). Having discussed how identity has changed, it will be appropriate to discuss how this has enabled pre-teens construct their identity in the way that they do in this digital age. However, before going in this direction, it will be important to introduce a discussion on the role the act of consumption has in the transition and self-definition of young persons. Thus, the following the section will seek to provide an answer to this.

3.4 Crafting an Identity: The Pleasure of Consumption as The Starting Point of Adulthood

The formations of girls' consumption habits as a part of their active style construction have become increasingly relevant to social sciences. Researchers have changed their focus from the "seduction of buying" over young people to the impact of media on gendered practices of shopping (Malik, 2005).

Before digital media's fast expansion into quotidian human activities, some studies reflected that magazines were deeply implicated in forming, fashion, shopping and style habits. Through magazines, determined cohorts of girls were introduced and educated into what it means to "consume like a woman." However, before then, some scholars argued that shopping represents a learning tool for young people to use in later life (Malik, 2005). Moreover, young people habits are also linked with their older self-perceptions and aspirations. The possibility of shopping represents the symbolic entrance of young women into adulthood; hence, we can assume that the consumption habit of pre-teens are as a rite that signals a genuine transition (Malik, 2005).

However, the transition process implies that the frontier between cultural ages has become blurred which means that childhood, tweenhood, teenagehood, adolescence, and early adulthood have interconnections that are perceived in a more fluid form in today´s approaches in scientific studies (Weinberger et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has become possible to establish a clear link between pre-teens and emerging adults. The way pre-teens visualise themselves as emerging adults, conditions the decisions they make in the present, as it will represent a guide when performing every day's activities like dressing up or shopping. The emerging adult category is a more liquid description of a period of self-focus and self-exploration embedded in a period of identity formation and role confusion (Weinberger et al., 2017). The emerging adult category is usually placed between adolescence and adulthood, but one of its main characteristics is that it can vary from culture to culture. Economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) can condition the emerging adult period for each individual. For middle-class emerging adults, it takes longer to leave their parents' home, finish school, find a job, be financial independent, get married and have children (Weinberger et al., 2017). The social script has been delayed for some, since, while middle class young adults are encouraged to enjoy this delay in the exploration of possibilities, working class young adults are likely to experience increased responsibilities and constraints (Weinberger et al., 2017). Nevertheless, pre-teens still find in emerging adults a future model that works as inspiration for their present identity construction whatsoever.

The differentiation between middle and working-class became relevant when referring to picturing a future and building a self accordingly. As a result of some studies, scholars have stated that many young working-class, particularly in the United States lack the capacity of

imagining a future, so it became difficult for them to establish and execute life strategies that would lead them to upward mobility (Weinberger et al., 2017). Emerging working-class adults are a force to grow up faster than the middle-class young persons; moreover, the inner self-construction and body projection I have been referring to, is often affected. In their relationship to magazines, not all young consumers have the symbolic power to achieve their vision of a future through fashion by incorporating the "media world" into their "ordinary world" (Malik, 2005). However, times have changed. Is it possible today to talk about the media world and the ordinary world as if they are divided? This will be explored in the following chapter by proposing a discussion on the influence of digital culture on pre-teens and the role it plays in way they construct their identity via fashion consumption.

CHAPTER FOUR

Digital Culture

4. Introduction

Contemporary society is marked by the rapid growth of communication and information, and it is often referred to as the information era (Uzelac, 2008). Authors such as Castells (1996) and Kahn and Kellner (2008) have indeed used phrases such as information society and network society to describe this digital era. Such a proposition reflects the relevance of information and communication to our day-to-day lives, Castells (1996) also asserting that the information age is an underlying factor that defines contemporary society. Adding that the shift from an industrial age to an information age goes back to around the 1970s (Castells, 1996), the key factor that determines the information age are networks whereby there is a consistent flow of information through emerging technologies. In this regard, the onset of information and communications technologies in the world have brought about technological ideals and dystopias of different types (Alsina, 2010). It is clear that humanity's digital environment is enveloping humankind, given the numerous digital technologies in our lives, as one would not notice their use of digital technology from home, work, transport sector, financial transactions, and also stock-market trading (Charlie, 2002).

In light of the above, this chapter will seek to understand the impact of digital technology on consumption, through the lens of pleasure. I will initially focus on defining what digital culture is, the influence it has on the pre-teen and its resulting impact. Thereafter, I will focus on an aspect of digital culture (social media), as it is hoped that it will provide a structured narrative that attempts to draw a link between the use of social media and the concept of imaginative

hedonism, and the subsequent impact on the way fashion is consumed and identity is constructed amongst this group. To approach this issue, I will begin by defining digital culture. Then, I will propose a discussion on the rise/new heights of digital culture as a result of improved ubiquity and the significance of digital technologies and the role this development in technology plays in how people construct their identity, what and why people consume, providing examples which will be used as a foundation for building a case that subsequently focuses on the impact of social media on fashion consumption as a whole. Thirdly, I will explore the subsequent impact of social media on young people and how, if at all, they use it to construct their identities. Lastly, I will provide an analysis of the use of social media through the prism of pleasure: the link between the use of social media and identity construction via consumption as a means of pleasure seeking amongst young people.

4.1 Defining Digital Culture

Digital culture is a concept which refers to how current digital trends are intermingling with the domain of cultures, media, and information technology, in addition to influencing new kinds of communication (Uzelac, 2008). Increased global connectivity and the upsurge of networks, challenges humanity's ways of comprehending culture, as according to Uzelac (2008:17), 'digital culture is participatory culture where users not only consume information but also contribute to it significantly'. A good illustration of this is the eminence of Web 2.0 or social software (Uzelac, 2008). This culture is determined by a constant change of dynamics, and it is through this culture that humankind is provisioned with digital tools for establishing innovative relations of information and world-wide interactions. Digital culture is a developing structure as articulated in the information media, and it defines how technology and the internet are modelling the way that we relate as humans: the way

we act, reflect and link within society (Sadiku et al., 2017). Digital culture is an example of a dramatic and crucial transformation resulting from the improving ubiquity and significance of digital technologies (Gere, 2009). Its ubiquity and its increasing indistinctness make it feel almost natural and, in this sense, it is ideological. The past three decades have featured globalization, free market capitalism, augmenting the boundlessness of information and of communications technologies as well as the mushrooming of power and the impact of techno-science (Gere, 2009). These developments have been catalysed through digital technology and to some extent, also influence their form i.e. the computerisation of banking, global currency interchange and trade-off has greatly aided the rise of globalization and economic liberalisation (Gere, 2009). Having discussed what digital culture is, the following section will seek to understand the role it plays in how people construct their identity and its influence in what they consume. This is important to this thesis as it will provide a foundation for building a case that subsequently focuses on the impact of social media on fashion consumption as a whole.

4.2 The Role of Digital Culture in Consumption and Identity Construction

Given that the focus of this chapter is to understand the level of engagement/interaction of pre-teens with digital culture, this section will seek to propose a discussion on the role development in technology plays in how people construct their identity and what and why people consume, providing examples which will be used as a foundation for building a case that subsequently focuses on the impact of social media on fashion consumption as a whole.

4.2.1 Consumption

The role of digital culture has been an enormously disruptive influence on technology and media. It plays a vital role in the development of technology and in technological advances which have changed the ways in which humans are able to communicate with each other. Technology lends itself well to digital culture and is currently used in social networks, messaging apps, blogs and other types of social interaction (Webster, 2010). Additionally, consumption patterns have evolved with changes in digital media, as is evident with the development of social media. Social media has risen to defy conventional notions of what media is, how it operates, and how it impacts society (Webster, 2010).

Today, the world is increasingly becoming a small place to be a part of, ideas, knowledge and cultures can be easily shared, and have all been made possible by advancements in digital media, especially social media. Though digital media is continuously changing, Webster (2010) states that there are three features which remain clear. Firstly, the supply of digital media materials is available in excess and is rapidly growing. Secondly, digital media is available across well integrated technological platforms, enabling users to access media products with ease. Thirdly, the supply of human attention needed to consume those products is limited. The combination of these features has created a situation in which the supply of media exceeds the time people have to consume it (Webster, 2010). This user information is vital in understanding how social media both creates and is created by behavioural patterns (Webster, 2010). Users make use of media products and services available, where appropriate. Essentially, 'media providers construct the environment within which users operate, but both media providers and users depend upon information to make sense of and manage the digital media environment. It is in this way that social networks have

become a pervasive instrument of information consumption and production. With their growing availability, they have become ubiquitous tools to share and consume information in many different content formats, subsequently also becoming immersed into people's lives in many ways' (Webster, 2010: 598-599). For example, a study conducted by Pan and Thomas (2012) on the experience of consumers using social media to consume products, found that people's motivation for consuming electronic devices, included factors such as personal needs, self-identification and self-representation. However, with regards to fashion consumption, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest also influence their decisions (Pan and Thomas, 2012).

4.2.2 Identity

Digital media has contributed to the fluidity that has come to characterise social life in the twenty-first century, as people and ideas are accorded a chance to move virtually. According to Darvin and Norton (2010:22) Identities become unbounded and deterritorialised, no longer tied to fixed localities, patterns, or cultural traditions.' This changes the way people work, play and develop relationships, which exerts extra demand on the self, especially as they negotiate their private and public lives. This fluidity also encourages a "networked individualism", where individuals are connected but also controlled by scheduling, monitoring and regulation (Darvin and Norton, 2010). This level of fluidity, complexity and unpredictability is characterised by Blommaert (2013) as "superdiversity", where identities are organised and distributed differently, online and offline. Within this, communities of interest globally are able to connect and interact, which helps to shape new global publics and forms of segmentation. By creating new forms of productivity, representation and socialisation, technology has helped change the way in which identity is performed (Darvin and Norton,

2010). Digital technology can be thought of as a marker of culture since it refers to not only artefacts but also systems of signification and communication which sets out the current modern life from the rest (Gere, 2009).

With new digital technology, there are new ways of collaborating, and interacting, in addition to new ways of shaping society. Furthermore, taking into account the rapidity of information flow through digital culture, the influence of such culture on an acquisition of identity is relatively strong (Deh and Glodjovic, 2018). This is because digital cultures represent a fundamental and refined image of a culture that outlines that which is collective and leaves out the aspects that are deviant from society, in essence it provides the opportunity to display a "refined" self. In digital culture, a person who feels unappreciated and unable to fit in is accorded a chance to build changes and present their self in a manner that fluctuates from their real self. Therefore, the paradox of belongingness, where a person fails to fit in the community, is manifested when they end up constructing a distinct identity and inserting it in digital space. In effect, it allows for the potential formation of new identities and thus new forms of personhood. Darvin and Norton (2010) state that a person's sense of self and how they relate to the world is continuously changing and as the digital age provides multiple spaces for user engagement, people are able to move online and offline with greater fluidity, while performing multiple identities. This is in line with the notion of hypermodernism, where its validation is found on the emphasis of use of new technology to overcome natural limitations; in the case of young people, this is the use of the digital space to create new identities (Fortier and Castellanos, 2017). However, the downside of the hypermodern society is that it is confined by the present, with modern day young people being caught up in the middle (between the past and the future), as they are not able to perceive what is crucial to

building meaning (Fortier and Castellanos, 2017). This concurs with the views of Charles and Lipovetsky (2005:1) who state that 'while the hypermodern individual is oriented towards pleasure and hedonism, he/she is also filled with the tension and anxiety that comes from living in a world which has been stripped of tradition and which faces an uncertain future'.

Given that this chapter seeks to understand the impact of digital technology on consumption, amongst young people through the lens of pleasure, this is significant: digital technology provides a foundation to build a balanced narrative on the impact of social media on young people. Hence, the following section will aim to provide an answer to this as well as demonstrate the link between the use of social media and identity construction via fashion consumption as a means of pleasure seeking amongst young people

4.3 Young people and Digital Culture

4.3.1 The Impact of Social Media on Young people as Consumers

The rise of the digital era has changed the way in which daily activities are carried out. As a consequence, the means of consumption have been affected and advances in technology have created a cultural gap, leaving the industry with a population that consumes and process information differently when compared to the past. With advancements in technology, there was a shift from big computers to portable mobile phones with high computing abilities. Tools and technology became smaller and with increasing portability, people got more access to it (Millman, 2016). With a vast amount of information now readily accessible via the internet, children in particular, are able to ask questions that they would not generally ask their parents. Something that runs parallel but invisible to this is the formation of identity. This

conforms to the famous proverb "What's seen is sold". Given the situation, it is therefore, no surprise when young people start to follow trends that they see across social media. According to a study by Kataria (2017) on tween consumers, 53% of tweens aged 9-14 years checked user review on an item on social media before purchasing it, with 52% of them saying that could trust these users, despite them being strangers.

Digital and Mobile media has provided an alternative perspective which suggests that young people believe that they know better than their parents on how to manage things (Clark, n.d) which is highlighted by Prensky (2001) when he discusses the concept of the digital native and the digital immigrant. The concept of digital natives proposed by Prensky (2001) states that because young people have grown up in a technological world, their brain develops differently from adults in previous generations, adding that this group is used to receiving and processing big amounts of information and are able to change their attention just as quickly. While for those outside this group, the term "digital immigrant" was attributed. Digital immigrants have the possibility of being part of the digital world, but they rarely accept it and simply flow with its changes in the way that natives do (Prensky, 2001). This is the main reason for this rise of portability, where young people are now much more likely to explore their identity through online tools 'when their sense of self, their intellectual curiosity and even their sexuality are beginning to form and mature' (Cox News Service, 2011:online).

Nowadays, with the development of digital culture, young people are no longer limited to a physical magazine or their surroundings as a point of reference when attempting to construct their identity (Kobia, 2016). In 2014, an estimation showed that approximately 70% of the

total population in virtual worlds or online users range between ages 10 to 15 (Millman, 2016). Additionally, according to Ofcom (2019), 70% of 12 – 15-year-olds have a profile on social media, with Facebook being used the most. While Snapchat and Instagram came in behind in second and third (Statista, 2019). This is significant as Chittenden (2010) states that young people have the most cash availability to spend on merchandise, whether it is due to the little to no financial responsibility or because there is a cash flow into their development, when added, it makes sense that market tendencies are changing to focus on this massive market potential.

Blue (2013) argues that the traditional television ad and other common publicity means are no longer relevant to today's young people as they are constantly multitasking: using phones during shows, downloading music, and scrolling through different social media platforms. Adding that, the dominance that media had in the past now belongs to social media, where young people focus all their attention. Hence, the same effects that social media has on young people, like increasing information sharing, and positively influencing relationships can also be used by brands to the same effect (Blue, 2013). Here, social media brings out the urge to consume, edit, reform, and supplement one's identity, which the fashion industry have mostly benefited from. Osgerby (2004) uses the example of the renowned fashion brand, Diesel and its development with respect to consumer needs and feedback. Diesel used marketing strategies to lure customers in, and through advancement in electronic media, customers are able to make purchases and shape their identity from the comfort of their homes.

The rise of digital trends has, of course, paved the way for digital marketing, where brands feel that they can better target their demographic audience through tools of digital marketing. Brands are aiming to connect with young people on a different level than previously due to their high purchasing ability (Sancheti and Kamal, 2009), and despite it requiring more work to facilitate the communication between the brand and customer, it creates more loyal consumers among young people, as brand loyalty is often developed during pre-teen years (Tiggemannm and Slater, 2014). Digital trends also suggest that young people are much more likely to follow the fashion trends of their media role model. This becomes an easy choice for them as these role models are much more actively available to view on the social media platforms. Rysst (2010) suggests the modern-day trend of young girls are that they want to dress older than they are. Adding that, this poses an ethical dilemma for these girls and their parents from the consideration of how they present themselves, as young people do not want to be young anymore. The digital age is the biggest catalyst to this, as according to (Rysst, 2010) prior to the digital age, there were many barriers to entry for this demographic or any demographic but now it becomes tempting not to purchase an item of clothing that was worn by a celebrity. Clark (n.d.) states that young people want to be like their role models and brands put this condition to their benefit by targeting them with online adverts that lure them into a marketing trap, which they willingly fall into. Furthermore, for digital natives, there is now less of a difference between going to a store to try clothes, or selecting directly from an online store, as purchasing a new outfit does no longer requires going to a store to be admired or receive feedback on it. Now, digital media facilitates' interaction which reinforces identity perceptions or moulds the objective and ideal self for young people. For example, young people can create more than one identity through video games and virtual spaces that allow

them to customise characters and avatars, interact with other members of the virtual world, and everything without direct exposure (Brookes and Kelly, 2015).

Young people also use social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram to project themselves to virtual audiences, which is often done in a way that seems inconsistent or out-of-character, but the feedback they receive through their self-portrayals online is part of the process of identity development as social media represents an ice breaker for them (Brookes and Kelly, 2015). According to a study by Ofcom (2019) 54% of 12 -15-year-olds who go online agree that people post content online that make their life look interesting. They also found children had multiple accounts on social media platforms, which showed different level of visibility to each social group. Here, more visible accounts showed the idealised self while the less visible accounts showed the real self to a controlled group of friends (Ofcom, 2019). Supporting this, the study also found that children, and especially girls, are conscious about their physical appearance online as they are now using face-editing apps and filtering features on snapchat to alter their appearance because it is believed to make their faces look "prettier" and "brighter" (Ofcom, 2019).

Mascheroni and Pasquali (2013) argue that receiving a comment on a post is enough to start interacting and receiving reinforcement with positive comments from famous or relevant people on each specific social media or comments from strangers not only motivating young people but also increasing their confidence and self-esteem. This is consistent with a study carried out by Ofcom (2019), who found that 90% social media users aged 12-15 stated that social media made them feel happy or helped them feel closer to their friends. Additionally, 66% of 12-15s social media users said they send supportive messages to friends who are

having a hard time. On the other hand, Brookes and Kelly (2015) argue that this effect has not proved to be so significant if comments come from relatives or close family since there is already an expectation of positive feedback. Adding that, what is relevant is how much negative feedback is received in contrast to the positive, as an identity trait could be modified in this effect (Brookes and Kelly, 2015).

4.3.1.1 Identity Building in The Digital Age

Abiala and Hernwall (2013) describe the post-Internet identity building process as a focal point for the construction of post-modern identity, with its essential feature being fluidity. With the development of the Internet experience, the differences between stages have become blurred. Initial studies on young people digital world identity-building showed conclusions conditioned by technologies fascination, and it is not until recent studies, that the focus shifted to young people and their communicative needs as they appear to be expressed by this new media (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013).

Nowadays, it is possible to conduct research to measure the consequences of young people' pastimes online. One of the principal online activities is to expend time in online communities (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013). Online communities have changed over time as different technologies have been implemented to achieve higher levels of interaction such as photos, video, emoticons, games and videoconferences, among others. However, as scholars have changed their focus, it is perhaps more relevant to point out the ways in which young people have appropriated these technologies. 'Computer games and social networking are not just age-dependent, but gender-dependent as well', as boys expend more time gaming (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013:952); however, both genders pass through similar processes. As with

magazines, young people participate actively in social networks and gaming practices, choosing and selecting the features they find worthy of their identity projects: same process, different media. Despite being labelled the "net-generation" or Millennials, they are not a homogenous mass that acts identically inside this digital world. As with magazines, the Internet experience is produced by adults (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013). Indeed, young people execute their search for meaning within the cultural perceptions of adults. Nonetheless, the Internet is not a magazine. On the contrary to previous media like television and the magazines where there was only one direction in communication, on the Internet, since the development of the web 2.0, communication has become more decentralised. Adults build the space, but young people move purposively inside.

Schäfer (2011) states that one can observe two kinds of digital participation. Explicit participation from the user standpoint is related to contents actively produced by the user, like blogging, posting, tweeting and sharing. In contrast, implicit participation refers to unconscious production shaped by the automation actions users perform while online the limit of characters, the site policies and the customisation options "likes" and "dislikes" are examples of this. Social media platforms and games generate data about users for improved future features and monetisation purposes. However, all of these platforms are created by adults, so the experience is shaped by adults' representations of culture. Nonetheless, this does not mean that a different age group could not appropriate experiences designed for a specific age, however, as an example, the competences adults believe young people should have, will effectively be leading the design process. Hence, one can argue that young people find their space for identity crafting in implicit participation, within the exchanges of

experiences between peers and the interactions with projected identities by emerging adults/influencers in digital space.

Since adults construct online consumption, they also define the semiotic boundaries of participation. Over time, Internet-based identity construction seems to invite identity experimentation more than it does identity exploration (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013). Within the boundaries of explicit participation, young people are able to build and rebuild several alternatives identities, in the sense that they can present themselves as a being different from the physical body. Although the Internet allows for experimentation, all of the alternative identities are a continuum of their physical bodies (Kennedy, 2006); so, once again, it is imperative to go beyond the fascination with technology and uncover the links between offline and online presentations of the self.

Some studies speak about the development of a body-self in a digital environment: the body self is a visual representation of a reflected, mental, visionary and physical identity (Abiala and Hernwall, 2013). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that 'Constructing an online body-self is an intentional act often using and mixing different semiotic elements such as typographic text, images, sound, graphical style, and the composition and integration of these semiotic elements'. Hence, one could argue that the body-self is to our online participation what fashion represents as regards our physical world in our offline participation. However, since the body-self is created within the adults' implicit configuration of the practices, it is to be expected that cultural ages are also presented as a part of the design. For adults' construction of the digital experience in the physical world, it is also a continuum, therefore, adults' perceptions on how young people participation "should be", have an impact on the

real nature of young people participation. To be is an illusion, and this illusion has travelled through the history of humanity (Davis, 2013). The Internet is also a space which enforces particular gender expectations and forms of sexualization. Magazines used to "define" what it meant to be a woman for western patterns, that power transitioned to the Internet but in a broader range of forms.

4.3.1.2 Fashion as a Contributing Factor

Fashion appears to play a key role in how young people perceive themselves. Moreover, there is now a tendency to avoid using the same clothes too frequently. According to surveys results presented by the Daily Mail, social media is making people, especially young girls and women, purchase clothes less. Motivated by the chance of being seen many times with the same outfit, and since social media represents a visual history to them, the idea of appearing too many times in pictures with the same clothes makes them want to discard items quicker than previous generations. Under this trend, the same pieces are worn, on average, less than seven times. Translating to more shopping or at least with more frequency (MailOnline, 2019). This desire to purchase apparel more frequently is a novelty that apparently comes with the digital age, the earlier society learns how to pave a way for fashion trends, where the fast fashion model is not at the forefront of marketing a product, the earlier the character of children, who will later become young adults, can be positively modified. This growing trend of self-awareness of one's look is more prominent among young children in the current generation than in the past, as according to a survey by Yahoo, girls as young as 9 are having their first issue with body image, earlier than in previous generations (Mengal, 2016). Additionally, a survey by a fashion and lifestyle brand, found that 64% of parents think that children are more fashion conscious than in previous years (Salmon, 2014). This has influenced the behaviour of

the current generation of young people and is evident in every aspect, from their use of social media to their purchasing decisions. According to Barnes and Laird (2012), young people are influenced considerably by the marketing communications presented on social media, which in turn influences their buying behaviour, either positively or negatively, and as fashion changes, so does the wants and desires of young people.

The pace of fashion has changed drastically in the digital age, due to the availability and the changeability of information. Young people have become such a powerful demographic as is evident in the profits they bring into the industry per annum: in 2015, the global children's market gained sales of €135.6 billion, which was up from €122.1 billion in 2010 (The Business of Fashion, 2016) while it is estimated that the UK children's wear market will grow by 12% by 2022 (Globaldata, 2018). It is therefore not surprising that brands are clamouring to meet the 'needs' of this demographic. For example, the fashion retail platform, Farfetch has seen its children division grow from 9 brands to over 200 brands in five years. (The Business of Fashion, 2016; Farfatch, 2019).

Unlike in the past when young people were happy to wear comfortable clothes, today, clothes and accessories worn by young people are more likely to be considered to be controversial, precisely because they are used by young people to lay down identity boundaries. In particular, Fredrickson et al. (1997) and Goodin et al. (2011) believe that heightened sexuality at such a young age will give girls an impression of objectification, which may become a problem when considering self-esteem and perception issues in the future. However, prior to my focusing on this specific issue, it will be important to understand the link between the use of social media and identity construction via fashion consumption as a means of pleasure

seeking amongst young people. This Is important to this thesis because it will help us to understand the role of pleasure, as a contributing factor to the overall effect of social media on young people as consumers.

4.3.2 Young people Use of Social Media as a Means of Seeking Pleasure Via Fashion Consumption

The way consumers access pleasure is changing and although a number of authors have discussed pleasure and its relationship to consumption, this remains under-explored particularly when it comes to young people and their relationship to technology. Technology has long played an important role in constructing how, what and why people consume, however this has reached new heights with digital culture, specifically social media. Authors such as Grant (2014) and Kobia (2016) have discussed the impact of social media on young people's consumption patterns, and an analysis of these through the lens of pleasure may offer new insights as regards to providing a basis for the ideological reinvention of consumer capitalism. Thus, fashion is particularly important in this regard, as it provides momentary experiences of pleasure, but the significance of this lies beyond that experience insofar as it reinforces the power of consumer capitalism.

Fashion as an identity marker often stands out since it is associated with concepts like prestige, self-worth and social standing (Firat, et al., 2013). These ideas align with the concept of imaginative hedonism postulated by Campbell (1987) who reiterated that fashion has become the acceptable manner in which contemporary society fulfils its hedonistic desires. The concept of imaginative hedonism is surmised from the bulk of literature reviewed relating

to the influence of popular culture on young people consumerism propagated through digital culture. Fashion consumption among young people is expressly hedonistic because it goes beyond functionality to symbolise self-worth, which according to Venkatesh et al. (2010), is when fashion becomes an identity-marker insofar as the visual picture depicts a prosperous social identity that eclipses personal virtues. This concurs with the views of Auty and Elliot (1998) and Hokkanen (2014) as they argue that fashion serves as a social identity and identifying and recognising the importance of multiple selves and social identities becomes important to advertisers as they sell symbolic relevance. This leads to self-expression becoming aligned to fashion products, as mediated experience from media exposure gives the pervasive feeling that an individual is incomplete without a particular fashion item consolidate the role of fashion as an identity marker. Additionally, Firat et al. (2013) argue that consumerism is a culture that emphasises the transformation of needs into desires thereby suggesting the primacy of status over functionality.

Moreover, Auty and Elliot (1998) investigate the ways in which clothing and other fashion accessories serve as social identity markers that are often exploited by advertisers to sell upscale products. They state that without this identity marker attached to fashion products, it would be difficult to sell the same fashion products every season. It is not therefore surprising that young people would stand in line for hours to purchase a newly released item, for example a pair of yeezys trainers. Fashion shows popularised through fashion week further establishes fashion as an identity marker as is demonstrated in the rush to purchase clothes and accessories showcased on runways, as such possessions indicate a particular status.

Young people are a target in consumer culture because the earlier they are ingrained with the notion that fashion is an identity maker, the more they will become hooked. The higher end the product, the more an individual will be identified as a member of a more prestigious group (Dittmar, 2008). Banister and Hogg (2007) argue that an individual's clothing is the basis of judgment showing the aspect of social construction represented through fashion. In this light, young consumers identify themselves through their relationship with brands and they therefore create relationships based on such parameters. Those who spot expensive brand items are considered important and those who wear non-brand items can often be marginalised.

Looking closely at hedonism through the lens of Campbell (1987), O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002), and Belk et al. (2003) it becomes evident that the pleasure-seeking principle has been part of human society as far back as the ancient era. It is also clear that, not least in the digital age, hedonism has evolved to a more exaggerated level in which individuals attempt to own exquisite commodities as a way of validating and reinventing themselves at rapid speed (Belk et al. 2003). Campbell (1987), O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002), and Belk et al. (2003) have all paid attention to the concept of imaginative hedonism which necessitates its application to understanding the consumption patterns of young people in this digital age. Interest in the consumerist attitude of this demographic has grown increasingly because of the revenue they bring into the fashion industry (Drake-Bridges and Burgess, 2010). Scholars such as Baker et al. (2019) and Boden (2006) insist that young people are exposed to the materialistic culture through stereotypical

representations portrayed in marketing. Most of these stereotypical representations are obvious through variables like entertainment, familiarity with celebrity culture and self-imaging. Exploring these variables will enable the attainment of the aforementioned research goal. The ability of marketers to reach young people and encourage the spirit of consumerism in shaping identities, especially in the young, is problematic, which is why O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002:526) call it 'the dark side of consumer marketing', with identity and self-worth being measured through fashion consumption, which justifies the negative tone posited by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002). Given that this thesis seeks to understand the influence of digital culture on consumption, this is significant, because in order to deliver what in this case is a conceptual contribution that answers the research objective, it will be important to discuss the subsequent impact of the digital age on consumption in greater detail. However, before going in the direction, the next sections will seek to discuss the variables that influence fashion consumption in this digital age.

4.3.2.1 Entertainment

Given that this thesis seeks to propose an analysis of the use of social media through the lens of pleasure, it is important to explore entertainment as it is one of the variables that enhances the concept of pleasure-seeking. Entertainment is defined as an important cultural category 'understood through an aesthetic system that privileges emotional engagement, story, speed and vulgarity' (McKee et al., 2014:1). This definition ties in with Lasswell (1948) and Wright (1960) who underscore four functions that entertainment must possess, which include, surveillance, correlation, transmission and function. These parameters suggest that

entertainment must operate in tandem with environmental currents, must represent the societal feelings and transmit cultural heritage as well as function as a tool of leisure.

Incidentally, social media has introduced media saturation within society leading to entertainment becoming a variable through which young people consume fashion, as according to a study conducted by Ofcom (2019:online), 'three in ten children aged 8-15 who use social media believe that all or most of what they see on there is true.' Social media as a means through which young people are exposed to fashion commodities have been explored by scholars such as Baker et al. (2019) and Northup and Liebler (2010). They argue that the two major ways through which young people are exposed to fashion products via entertainment are: messaging and influencers as fashion change agents - influencers with particular sets of fashion skills. Whilst discussing messaging, Northup and Lieble (2010) state that contemporary entertainment projects an underlying materialistic message which implies that status and identity are defined by fashion brands. Entertainment has moved from being family centred and encouraging the cultivation of intangible values like kindness and inner beauty to exploring superficial traits like trendiness (Brannon 2010; Northup and Liebler, 2010). Northup and Liebler (2010), study entertainment programmes on productions catering for the young; Nickelodeon and Disney and opine that most of the programs project an ideal of beauty attainable only through fashion consumption. The focus on trendiness and the open promotion of luxury fashion commodities on these entertainment channels promote the yearning to possess such items, since these products can be purchased on online shops, desire easily translates into purchase (Rueter, 2012). The digital media creates a one stop shop for both entertainment and the consumption of fashion products since it has become the

preferred way of accessing entertainment outlets (Baker et al., 2019; Northup and Liebler, 2010; Rueter, 2012). According to Storm (2014: online), '72% of social shoppers are influenced by Facebook in at least one fashion category, with Facebook also accounting for 22% of direct social-to-sale purchases in fashion and beauty.' Consumer marketers have taken advantage of this to place ads that encourage the desire for shopping. It is therefore not unusual to get interrupted by ad breaks promoting fashion commodities related to the content being viewed and links to the online shops selling the items (Rueter, 2012).

Apart from messaging, influencers as fashion change agents is another phenomenon that has become a subtext of contemporary entertainment. According to Baker et al. (2019) fashion change agents are innovators of fashion who have the ability and the means to spot and sample new fashion trends before they become mainstream items. Influencers have an advantage as fashion change agents because they are in the spotlight and have purchasing power. Hence, images posted by influencers on Instagram get an 'additional 4x engagement rate, for an 8x increase' (Harrison, 2017: online). Most influencers spot fashion brands and accessories as brand ambassadors, encouraging their fans to purchase them - they act as the middle man between the brand and young people (Boden, 2006).

As this thesis seeks to propose an analysis of the use of social media through the lens of pleasure, it can be said that messaging and fashion change agent via entertainment are elements which significantly contribute to the desire to consume items amongst young people. Here, messaging and fashion change agent are what Bourdieu (1984) describes as the 'emotive words and images' used by seller to lure consumers into consuming. Concerning

this subject, Campbell (1987) also argues that society is replacing the old-times sensory pleasure with imaginative hedonism. For Campbell (1987) modern hedonism is characterised by day-dreams, i.e. by imaginative pleasure seeking, by creating mental figures giving rise to the illusion of pleasure. And even if a person knows that it is only a mental and false representation, the person feels this representation as being true: this is because visualising situations often stimulates actual emotional experiences, and these emotional experiences are activated in the martketing communication process to determine the buyer's preference. Hence, for example, advertising as argued by Campbell (1987) and Bourdieu (1984) goes a long way in appealing to the emotions of a consumer whereby the latter believes that consuming a particular product will bring them pleasure. In the context of entertainment in this digital age, we can say that messaging and fashion change agents creates a similar emotional response, in that the "romantic" (what is exotic and idealised) materialistic culture is used on social media to lure young people into consuming.

4.3.2.2 Familiarity with Celebrity Culture

Entertainment as a vehicle of consumption among young people is closely linked to infatuation with celebrity culture promoted through social media platforms like Instagram, Pinterest and TicTok. Harrison (2017) states that celebrities effectively run platforms like Instagram. Adding that, the users on Instagram are more active and engaged than Facebook. Meanwhile, the use of celebrity endorsement on Instagram comes with a special authenticity. Here, consumers are accorded the chance see into a celebrity's personal life and when they see them using a particular product, there is often a credibility factor attributed to that product (Harrison, 2017).

Driessens (2013) defines a celebrity as an individual who is popular and recognisable by a huge part of the population. Driessens (2013) further indicates that familiarity with celebrity culture has been vastly promoted by news and entertainment outlets. Advertisement and activism are fields in which celebrity culture thrives, underscoring the fact that a cause or a commodity is worth consuming only if a celebrity identifies with it. Celebrities are often movie stars, sports icons and musicians who have touched their fans with their talent (Boden, 2006). Advertisers take advantage of this trend to push brands and associate them with celebrities of choice. Some celebrities use the same medium to promote their own products, a practice which Driessens (2013:5) calls "celebrification". This is because the celebrity is 'both labor and the thing that labor produces'. The yearning to be famous, to be liked is equally linked to the concept of desire that influences young people to purchase fashion items via the digital machinery (Baker et al., 2019). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube give the impression that celebrity status is attainable by everyone. Emulating celebrity culture by consuming the same fashion brands they are associated with, becomes vital, as just as influencers are seen as fashion change agents, young people also perceive themselves as such within their peer groups (Baker et al. 2019; Northup and Liebler, 2010). It only suffices to have a social media following and post constantly about novel fashion products and accessories. This concurs with the study conducted by Ofcom (2019: online), where it was found that 'children value having personal 'clout' online, as it provides them with a higher status in the offline world too'

Familiarity with celebrity culture has created the pervasive feeling that anyone can be a celebrity depending how it is being portrayed (Baker et al., 2019). This accounts for why so

many young people are trending on social media with fashion related niches (Brannon, 2010). Receiving likes on posts has become the decider on who is trendy and who is not and for this to be consistent, the consumption of new fashion items becomes necessary (Hokkanen, 2014). The majority of these social media platforms provide an outlet for young people to become influencers since they endorse any fashion commodity that seems to be in vogue (Baker et al., 2019). Validation comes from peers concretising the idea that anyone can become a celebrity. Baker, et al. (2019) observe that young people have become fashion change agents inputting directly into popular culture, digital innovations and brand commitment. Young people in the twenty-first century have an avid taste in fashion and the digital media gives them the opportunity to shop from the comfort of their own homes. This group no longer depends on their parents for their fashion choices but take the cue from peers' resident in their online communities. These communities are influenced by entertainment and adverts that circulate suggestive messages on the mediated value of fashion items. Given that this thesis seeks to explore the use of social media for pleasure consumption, this is important, as it shows how celebrity culture is used as a marketing tool to influence consumption patterns amongst young people. The significance of this is that, just like with "the emotive words and images" of advertising discussed in Chapter 2, it brings out desire, luring young people to consume because they seek to replicate the pleasure they envisioned the images seen online will provide. The desire here starts and is formed in the mind, even though if what is being desired has the ability to create these emotions in and of itself. Immersed in these desires, young people fantasise about the item they crave, which leads to their emotions becoming intensified. If the item being desired was of a sexual nature, we would say it is autoeroticism. This same autoeroticism is found in the desire for

consumption goods. Here, stimulating emotional experiences through mental images often includes fantasising about how it will feel to have the item being desired, which we can say is often replicated through social media.

4.3.2.3 Social Imaging

Social imaging is the creation of a virtual existence, that portrays an idealised self. This concept is problematic for young people because it erodes real values of self and endorses an ideal that does not exist. Boden (2006) uses the image of sports icons to illustrate the negative outcomes of idolisation among young people that leads to consumerism. Young people imitating their icons via fashion consumption is an outcome of familiarity with celebrity culture propagated by the digital age, as they are of the belief that such action will make them similar to their icons. Hence, Belk et al. (2003) argue that the concept of self has been equated to possessions that make children believe that self-worth must be tied to consumption power. This is in line with the concept of imaginative hedonism developed by Campbell (1987), where he states that consumers are not buying a specific product for the sensory pleasure they might derive but for the emotional experience, as they have imagined that acquiring the product will elevate their status among their peers, thus fulfilling their desire and giving them pleasure.

Social status becomes one of the core reasons why young people seek to own particular fashion brands and this assertion is supported by critics like Hackley (2005) who argues that social interface plays an active role in fashion consumption. Being "in vogue" entails being the first to purchase new products and those who can easily upgrade show that they are of a

higher social group. Social imaging in this instance distinguishes between the haves and the haves not, making it difficult for the two groups to mingle. This concept of self is also intertwined with fashion consumerism in the digital age as popular culture valorises the concept of the social self, where young people can create images of themselves that they feel is acceptable to their peers by attempting to imitate their celebrity icons. In this effect, self-imaging promotes the stereotype of the ideal and subverts the cultivation of real traits that enhance a true sense of self (Hokkanen, 2014).

4.4 Conclusion

The digital age has changed young people's perceptions of everyday life in numerous ways: young people who used to depend on parents for fashion choices are consulting the internet for guidance and purchasing according to a process of self-imaging. Stereotypical representations of fashion have become heightened through entertainment, familiarity with celebrity culture, and self-imaging that propel the choices of young people. Identity is increasingly conceived of by young people through ideal concepts of celebrity worship and self-imaging derived from mass media disseminated through the entertainment industry (Baker et al. 2019). Hence, the current generation of young people growing with the technology of mass communication and the digital world have a perception that gives more relevance to their identity and self-perception than previous generations. In addition, consumption is entirely different from what the market is used to, young people are depending on virtual retailers and social media to acquire references of what is currently trending. Social media platforms are also changing behaviour towards consumption in a way that clothes have become necessary to not only strengthen identity or social binding among

young people, but to sustain self-image, as the easy access to online personal history makes it possible for young people and their peers to a diversity of representations. This is as a result of the rising trend, where clothes are not consumed solely for functional purposes, but more for how consumers, and in this case, young people want to be seen in digital space.

Finally, with digital cultures, the construction of personality among young people is inherently determined by digital space. The emergence of new technologies in addition to the accelerated rate in which young people are exposed to technologies, has substantially contributed to the development of their identities within the digital space. Hence, it can be said that young people nowadays adhere to an imaginative hedonistic lifestyle by yearning for an ideal identity promoted by consumerism; a consumerism that is reinforced and intensified by the avenues that the digital provides.

In the preceding paragraphs, the relation between fashion and culture in young people was analysed. It was shown how it is that fashion can be understood as a materialisation of identities and how the materialisation mentioned above is produced by conscious decisions of active and purposive social agents. The intention of avoiding the trap of assuming specific characteristics of young people based on cultural age bias was a clear guide to focus the attention on the one space where their competencies are more evident today: The Internet. The impact of digitalisation in identity construction covers different issues, like the imposition of a pattern of behaviour through implicit participation. One example of these patterns is sexualisation. To this end, in the next chapter, I will be discussing the Internet as a kind of sexualisation space: I will thus focus on the sexualisation of young people through fashion

and how this is manifested via social media, where sexuality selection, projection and

embodiment is shaped.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Impact of Fashion on Young people as a Result of the Digital Age

5. Introduction

The argument I will present in this chapter focuses on the consequences of digital consumption as a result of pleasure seeking through imagination. In the previous chapter, it was shown how digitalisation influences young people, and the consequences of young people´s open access to the digital world created by adults. Here, sexualisation was identified as one of the consequences of the digital age. Given that this thesis seeks to understand the Impact of the digital age on fashion consumption amongst young people, this chapter in turn seeks to present an in-depth analysis of the relationship between sexualisation and digital participation among young people, in order to do this, I will begin by proposing a discussion around the commodification of childhood and its subsequent impact. Then, I will seek to understand what is meant by sexualisation, before proceeding to discuss the correlation between digitalisation and sexualisation and how digital space favours this phenomenon. Also, I will present the consequences of sexualisation, including the differences between boys' and girls' experience of it, concluding with what the aforementioned objectives have informed us about the relationship between social media and young people and the changing nature of consumption.

5.1 Commodification of Childhood

Nowadays, due to technological advancement, the role of media and commercialisation is increasing in the lives of people. It is becoming a public opinion and social issue that western media is showing questionable content considering the young members of society.

Children are generally considered to be innocent beings who develop their personalities through behaviour that they learn from their surrounding and socially constructed values. Before 1930s, merchants and advisers barely paid any attention to children as a potential market for their products. With the rise and start of capitalism where companies identified themselves as an industry, companies and advertisers began paying attention to children as individual consumers. They introduced children's clothing, action toys, Barbie dolls and household items. With the advancement in time and technology, this childhood consumer culture effectively turned children into commodities. This helped to grow this culture further and now it has turned into new shapes which are more hazardous for sustaining society.

The commercialisation of children not only helped in marketing and in the growth of the advertisement industry, it also helped children develop their personalities according to what they are doing and what is happening around them. Cook (2004) states that marketers, advertisers and merchants not only came to commercialise children, but they also created another genre of consumers in the form of children which in itself represents one of the big achievements of capitalism in the twenty-first century. Cook coined the term dichotomy after childhood consumer culture and their commodification, which relates to the exploitation of children through media by the market. In this regard, as this dissertation seeks to explore sexualisation as an example of commercialisation for young people, it is important to discuss how the digital space intensifies the commodification process. However, before going in that direction, it will be necessary to first define the characteristics of pre-teens as consumers.

5.1.1 Characteristics of Pre-Teens

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, the meaning of childhood has drastically changed. Reshaped views of both childhood and parenthood are debated constantly, proposing new definitions based on the changes in the way the "family" is now structured: the standardized meaning of childhood as an innocent demographic that need to be protected, and the related development of parenthood as being culpable for the separation. Also, an emerging market for young people especially as well as the evolution of their consumption patterns are some of the most powerful changes (Kobia, 2016).

Pre-teens are actively trying to work out who they are, which makes their identity construction an important feature in their life. Young people's identities are often shaped by factors such as peer group, mass media and social expectations. They choose the places and people they want within their group and often change their behaviour based on comments they receive. And while all these are being processed, they are still actively trying to figure out who they are. Identity is constructed in part, based on established relationships and comments received from peers. Pre-teens use the digital space to project themselves to their online viewers, they may do this in a way that could be said to be out-of-character, but the comments they get through such online portrayal is part of their identity building process. Social media plays a key part in this as they have the chance to get closer to those influences, they want; they are no longer limited by a physical magazine or their surroundings.

To project the desired identity, dressing up is an important aspect and key element of socialisation. Since childhood, people are called to act on their bodies, but fashion, especially in this digital age, is considered to be one of the most effective ways in which expression and

identity can be reflected (Kobia, 2016). Pre-teens are experiencing physical changes and are figuring themselves out and where they belong in society. As they go from family security to a peer-dominated setting, social bonds become important in helping to build their identity: any negative feedback can be of great concern. Pre-teens are often worried about their peer group seeing them differently from how they see themselves. It is in this context fashion becomes an important tool for pre-teens as it can provide resources from which pre-teens are able to construct their identity. It can be used to develop social bonds through dress code worn by their peer group. Alliances and familiarities are found and form through brands, styles or particular dressing codes that change between the identification or group they want to belong (Paix, 214).

5.1.2 Commodification in Digital Space

To begin with, the concept of dispositif proposed by Foucault will be considered here. Foucault describes dispositifs as spaces where the conditions are specifically created to generate a power-related effect (Foucault, 2012). The school, the hospitals and prisons are examples of dispositifs, as these building´s design were developed to unbalance the social relations inside them to favour one of the parts. It is through dispositifs that the notions of what is right or normal and what is wrong or perverse were built. The analysis of sexuality is always an analysis of power since the latter is everywhere. The digital analysis of sexuality does not remain outside this affirmation, it is just another context.

Hence, following Foucault's perceptions on how several spaces worked as dispositifs of power in an individual's everyday routine, one might think that the expansion of the Internet´s usage

could affect the process of internalisation previously mentioned. Indeed, these institutions did not disappear but transitioned into this new space. Through the Internet, multiculturalism and the production of alternative discourses have found a means of expression and the ability to reach audiences that they would previously not have reached. All sorts of messages hit their target audience while the traditional dispositifs of power have adapted their means of projection. Digital religious rites, digital spaces for medicine, digitally organise learning, are examples of such transitions.

Within the process of transition of institutions and commodification, exist the ancient characterisation of children as inherently innocent creatures who need to be taken care of (Clark, 2008). That is one of the main reasons why the sexualisation of children as a commodification strategy has become a central topic in both academic and popular spaces.

In addition to school, the place where the second process of socialisations used to start (Nash, 1990), children have potential access to influences since their early years, and they gain more control of their agency while growing up. Nonetheless, the market has also adapted to the new reality, and the commodification strategies that have targeted young people seeking identity in this new context as a multimillionaire marketplace (Cook, 2009). Children are 'seen as less able to rationally understand or critically engage with ideologies expressed by more powerful actors in society' (Cook, 2008:13). In this line of research, authors such as Levin and Kilbourne (2008) have concluded that negative messages are firmly implanted in the minds of children, due to their limited capacity to process information and their higher susceptibility to suggestions, since they are unable to perceive when nor how they are being manipulated. To sum up, pre-teens are considered incapable of dealing with the new sexual culture, because they lack the skill to resist the marketing strategies that aim to make them internalise

particular consumption patterns that may have implications for how their sexuality is represented (Vares and Jackson, 2015).

Another study demonstrates that children can actively and critically engage with media representation in complex ways. The evidence of this is seen in their relationship with everyday media. Here, their understanding of media representation goes beyond the binary passive-active relation. This is a more dialogic process where pre-teens choose elements that would help them to accomplish their objectives from the influence they receive (Vares and Jackson, 2015). Not being able to comprehend the influences received altogether is not an incompatible fact with an actor´s agency. This work aligns with the latter view regarding children in relation to sexualisation.

Children's thoughts and personalities are arguably becoming more affected by the fashion world and representation of media content. Mass media is considered as an important tool to represent culture and providing information and entertainment. However, it is evident that media is not fulfilling its role accordingly. Authors such as Tiggemann and Slater (2014) and Vares and Jackson (2015) discuss the negative portrayal of girls' image and bias towards boys, however this bias towards the opposite gender also leads to psychological disorders in boys.

The easy access of contradictory demonstration of both genders is affecting the behaviour of both young boys and girls. It could well be argued that girls are bearing more consequences of media representation of their gender as compared to boys. Clark (2008:2) states that 'Feminist research in particular has maintained a strong case that boys are simply not addressed to the same extent as girls in a discussion of sexualisation and fashion. This could

have several meanings: one being the traditional argument that while girls and women are the objects of sexual desire, men are the owners of 'the gaze', the ones who do the looking'. However, before discussing the differences between each gender and the subsequent impacts in greater detail, it is important to reflect upon gender as a social construct.

Gender as a construct is brought about by the internalized belief that men and women are different which makes them appear to behave differently (Lumen, n.d). Thus, the issue of gender is constructed by expectations and gender performance. In this regard, expectations integrate views on how society wants to see females behave differently from males. As such, if an individual wants to be perceived as male, they have to act within acceptable norms in the society that reinforce the concept of masculinity. On the other hand, females are also expected to work within the norms and exhibit performances that accentuate the concept of femininity. Importantly, an individual can act contrary to the expectations of the performance of men or women. Acting contrary to the expectations in this way raises conflicts and questions on what gender identity one identifies with. As indicated, gender is an internalised element, and an individual will either conform with the norms or display how they would like to be perceived. Therefore, if one wants to be perceived as masculine or feminine, they will act as such. Gender influences how advertisements are made and hence leading to commodification and sexualization of individuals (Tuncay et al., 2014).

Marketers try to create adverts that will resonate with a particular gender (that is with being male or female). According to Cook (2004) the commodification of young people is an attempt by the marketers to position products as being synonymous with that particular age group. It is the same concept that is used in gendered advertisements. For instance, an advert targeting

men will show images of masculinity and toughness. On the other hand, adverts targeting women will show some level of tenderness and sexiness. In popular culture as well as on social media, women and men tend to have roles that resonate with the construct of gender performance, the way individuals are portrayed on both platforms will show the different expectations pegged on masculinity and femininity (McGregor et al., 2016).

As this chapter seeks to understand the relationship between sexualisation and digital participation among young people, it was important to first acknowledge gender as a social construct. This will help to provide a clear context in which to define sexualisation from, how it occurs amongst young people and the differences between both genders. Having clarified the intention and relevance of this section, the following section will seek to define what is understood by sexualisation.

5.2 What Can Be Understood as Sexualisation

It is essential to distinguish sexualisation from healthy sexuality. The construction of sexual identity, despite it happening within the social structure, is a natural stage of development in every individual. Development occurs in three principal areas: cognitive development, which is in relation to children's capacity of internalising the world, physical development which can be measured through the growth of the body, coordination abilities and sexual maturity, and emotional development, where social and psychological development advance towards an understanding of the self in conjunction with all related topic such as gender and identity (Clark, 2008).

According to the APA (American Psychological Association), sexualisation occurs when a person's worth only comes from his/ her sexual appeal to the point that other characteristics are excluded (Collins et al., 2010). It occurs when an individual is held to a standard that equates physical beauty with sexual appeal, in other words, when a person is sexually objectified. This means that he/she is made as a "thing" for sexual use by others, rather than being seen as a person capable of making independent decisions (Collins et al., 2010; Goiran, 2010). An example of this, was a 2007 Dolce & Gabbana advert which showed a female model being restrained by a man while a group of half-dressed men stood over her. This particular advert embodied the concept of the "male gaze", where women are portrayed as sexual objects for the objectification of men (Duncan, 2015). Only one of these definitions is needed so one can state that there is sexualisation. In the present text, the latter definition will be the one mostly discussed. However, it is essential to highlight that the word "inappropriately" responds to norms western society lives under.

Nevertheless, why is sexualisation a strategy used in commodification? Some theories state that the human brain has evolved to be more responsive to messages from the following sources: fighting, fleeing and feeding (Paix, 2014). Regardless of the appropriate or inappropriate nuances of those messages, our brain is configured to internalise the learning experiences related to survivability more quickly and easily (Paix, 2014). On top of that, the term 'tweens' (pre-teens) is a concept in marketing that has been well established for more than two decades now. Between the last years of the twentieth century and the first year of the new century several brands have launched products designed for the pre-teen market. In 2000, Vogue started to experiment with this segment of the market towards the announcement of Teen Vogue in 2003. Other brands also grabbed this marketing opportunity

with offers like Cosmos Girl and Elle Girl. As a result, young people quickly became a definable and knowable commercial persona and by implication what was effectively a stage of youth. However, young people also became the target of any marketing strategies that gradually came to incorporate more and more forms of sexualisation (Cook and Kaiser, 2004). In order to paint a detailed picture of how this came to be, it will be important to understand the influential nature of young people as consumers and how this subsequently led to them being sexualised.

5.2.1 Influential Nature of Pre-Teen Consumers

Young people's consumption power is very valuable to the fashion industry. This is because as I pointed out in Chapter 1, pre-teens are considered to be "the richest generation" in history, as their spending ability has increased immensely over the past decades (Lindstrom, 2004). The influential nature of pre-teens has been studied in depth by various researchers such as Cook (2007:34) who reiterates that 'the child consumer today appears as a contested figure on the landscape of consumption. It stands both for corporate exploitation and individual freedom'. The significant consumption capability of pre-teens is also evident in that household purchases are often controlled directly or indirectly by this group (Lindstrom, 2004; Goodin et al 2011).

An example of the influential nature of pre-teen consumers can be seen in a Walmart campaign, where Walmart insinuated that children could persuade their parents to purchase anything they needed, if they so desired (Goodin et al., 2011). The product was a pink girls' underwear set in the junior section with the following by line, 'who needs credit cards… when you've got Santa' (Goodin et al., 2011:1). Santa in this instance represents the parents:

showing that the fashion industry is subconsciously making pre-teens "demanding" because parents would likely acquiesce to the needs of their children if they insisted. This approach might be considered to be underhanded and unethical, yet it appears to be working for the fashion industry, with the profits the industry gains annually.

Moreover, this does not end with the Walmart product but also extends to other brands like Abercrombie Kids. In 2010, Abercrombie began selling thongs and under garments for pre-teens with connotations such as "wink wink" and "eye candy", which they declined to take down as they claimed, 'the underwear for young girls was created with the intent to be light-hearted and cute' (Goodin et al., 2011:1), as apparently shocking as these items were, Abercrombie maintained its innocence by insisting that it was trying to be playful. Encouraging the sale of apparel similar to this item, can give young girl's a different impression about their bodies, as value can be seen to be accorded only to those who adorn themselves with appealing items. Goodin et al. (2011) go on to state that young girls might not understand the sex appeal that comes with wearing particular clothes but would enjoy the attention that wearing them brings, such as popularity, acceptance and a feeling of maturity. Adding that the negative implication here is that they may 'receive the message that sexiness is empowering, but rarely do girls learn about the potentially disempowering aspects of the sex object role' (Goodin et al., 2011:9).

The reification of young people by marketing strategies is, perhaps, the most visible space of sexualisation; however, several social institutions participate in this phenomenon. Hence, it can be argued that marketers exploit the influential nature of young people to their advantage. With the intention of fulfilling the aforementioned aim, this section becomes

relevant to this thesis as it provides examples where sexualisation occur. This will used to as a foundation to build a case that analyses how the digital space favours this phenomenon. Thus, the following section will look to explore the sources of sexualisation as this will help understand how the internet further heightens sexualisation through these sources.

5.2.2 Sources of Sexualisation

In the latest modification of the American Psychological Association on sexualisation, it concludes that there are diverse sources of sexualisation that may affect children, and especially girls. The sources can be grouped under societal contributions, interpersonal contributions and intrapersonal contributions.

Societal contributions refer to the cultural norms and expected behaviours internalised through socio-cultural media (Collins et al., 2010) including television, film, sports media, music videos and lyrics to popular songs, cartoon and animations, magazines, video and computer games, products design for young girls and Internet (Collins et al., 2010). The last update of this report was in 2010; thus, the Internet is analysed separately from the other mass media. However, over the last decade, up to 2020, the Internet has visibly absorbed and assimilated all of the other forms of media in the sense that representations that were often only seen or exposed in some forms of media are now present on the internet. Hence, the Internet has become a complex multiplatform that produces interconnected channels of sexualisation. An example of this is with social media, where it often features peers as well as celebrity icons. Here, although both sexes are sexualised, the way society is wired produces some differences between boys and girls regarding sexualisation. It is argued that being sexually experienced makes a boy admired by peers while peers will most likely scorn a

sexually experienced girl (Clark, 2008). This behaviour is commonly displayed in every contemporary human society but in the context of social media, exposure online can lead to more social comparison and body shaming than traditional media and thus more anxiety for the lived experience of the young person concerned (Hind and Jackson, 2001; Ng, 2017).

The interpersonal contributions include the whole family institution, the school, and the group's dynamics. While participating in those environments, young girls are exposed to sexualised discourses (Collins et al., 2010). Role models are crucial in a young person's development and while the relations with models start early on, during tweenhood, girls start to become more active in their pursuit of orientation. Through representations, girls learn what is, and is not socially acceptable, by observing roles played by other women in their quotidian activities (Clark, 2008). Children are capable of internalising their parents and other adults' actions, statement, ideas, positions on a subject, attitudes, behaviours, and appearance. Of course, today, majority of the "ideal models" are linked to social media platforms, where children can easily interact with them.

Intrapersonal contributions refer to the influence-agency relations previously mentioned. As a part of these contributions, one can identify the kinds of decisions young people make, like purposively engaging in flirty behaviour to gain an advantage in some environments, or self – reification by projecting themselves in mostly sexual terms (Collins et al., 2010; Paix, 2014). The Washington Post (2019) reports that 14.8 per cent of children have sent explicit text messages to their friends. Also, 24.8 per cent of adolescents have received sexual texts and other inappropriate sexual materials. Kamau and Mberia (2014) determined that more than

43 per cent of young people access explicit sexual materials through sharing in social media platforms. Here, digital spaces provide the possibility of evading regulation.

An interesting correlation between a physical state of development and intrapersonal sexualisation can be found in the weight gained by girls during puberty. Boys who show early signs of maturity are more satisfied with their bodies, whilst early maturing girls demonstrate increasing dissatisfaction, perhaps because puberty is linked to weight gain amongst females (Clark, 2008). However, the reason behind the weight gain represents an issue for some girls is that they currently live under an aesthetic pattern that celebrates one type of body and rejects others. Those bodies that stay away from the "viable one" are called "abject bodies" for a society. Some bodies projections are considered "unliveable", "uninhabitable" and survive in the peripheries of what is publicly considered correct (Butler, 2011a).

Sexualisation is socially embedded in the form of practices. However, the presentation of girls as a sexual object is commonly seen on the Internet, where particular practices of sexualisation such as sexting, grooming, and the change of the 'ideal figure' to look up to are constantly being produced. The Internet provides young people girl with an enormous pool of idols which, by the way, are immersed in the digital economy, so they produce content and project themselves on the premise of being different from their respective rivals. Not only so they can find older models but also idols within the same age group. In this regard, this informs us that although sexualisation is linked to a group of contributions, they are further heightened by the internet as young people not only engage with it visually but also physically. Having clarified the sources of sexualisation, it will be important to discuss the consequences of sexualisation, so as to understand the relationship between social media

and young people and the changing nature of consumption. The following section will attempt to address this issue.

5.2.3 Consequences of Sexualisation Through Fashion

Pre-teens are a group who are coming into the awareness of fashion choices in a world in which image and hype abound (Ito, 2009). This group therefore increasingly rejects what was previously associated with their childhood as well as their parent's fashion choices and are now actively making their own fashion decisions (Boden, 2006; Livingstone, 2009). Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005) argue that a yearning for fashion items among young people is linked to issues of body image and social status. This is in line with theories of body image that indicate that 'positive body image incorporates a sense of body appreciation, otherwise known as body gratitude' (Ekern, 2017:online). The fashion industry promotes negative self-imaging due to the body types portrayed in the media, which often distorts perceptions early on in life to the extent that keeping up with fashion trends becomes one of the main ways in which an individual can have a feeling of self-worth (Pourhosein et al., 2016). Croghan et al. (2007) also discuss style failure and alienation, where those who are side-lined as a result of their body types, feel left out. This is in line with the effects of deviant bodies postulated by Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005), where they compare the manner in which young girls and adult women perceive fashion, body image and dieting, and conclude that women of all ages have the desire to own fashion items that are popular, while being able to wear an item seen worn by a celebrity is often a mark of distinction. Additionally, Klepp and Rysst (2017) comment on how deviant body types that are antithetical to the images of models marketing fashion items, find it difficult to get suitable clothes because their body type is not

represented in the fashion industry. Hence, problems such as eating disorders and depression among young people with deviant bodies can arise, as they find it difficult to have the feeling of belonging with the normalised supermodel figures that market clothes (Klepp and Rysst, 2017). This is, therefore, a negative by-product of the fashion industry, which is why critics like Fralic (2014) describe the sector as soulless and inhuman, due to the unethical ways in which it descends in order to get clients hooked on an image of sexualised beauty that is not real.

Furthermore, style and identity are tied to peer pressure, which is also a factor that influences fashion consumption among young people (Sancheti and Kamal, 2009). May and Koester (1985) note that peer pressure increases with age and peers had the biggest influence on fashion consumption during the middle school years, with middle school children using fashion as a way to identify themselves with a particular peer group (Forney and Forney, 1995). Self-esteem is another reason that young people have apparently become fixated with fashion trends and the need to acquire them, with girls who see themselves as less attractive becoming more self- conscious and having lower self-esteem (Davies and Furnham, 1986; Simon, 2001; Sancheti and Kamal, 2009). Sancheti and Kamal (2009) also state that clothes can help to improve self-esteem, as it is one of the ways to secure a place in a social group, with Croghan et al. (2007) adding that the ability to afford a particular product show that an individual is fashionable and capable of affording the latest brands, while those who are unable to afford it are rejected as fashion "failures".

Moreover, as opposed to the past when young people were more likely to dress according to the norms of conventional society, which included suits, dresses and hats but with the adaptations for practicality, fashion standards today can be said to change much more rapidly

(Jones, 2017). Sexuality targeted at young people has become more of a commodity in the fashion industry, which the industry is eager to market, as according to Porter and Golan (2006: 13), the 'fashion and clothing industry tend to use a more serious approach to sexuality, as this industry sees sex as more direct appeal for their products than any other industries that use sex as a peripheral appeal'.

An example of this was an advert by Armani for their junior range which pictured a boy with long hair, wearing buggy jeans and a necklace. It was seen as offensive as it appeared to sexualise children, encouraging them to be like adults, with the Advertising Standards Authority concluding that the 'picture made the model's gender ambiguous and drew attention to the child's sexuality', therefore needed to be removed as it likely to cause serious offence (Hiscott, 2011)

Another example was an American appeal advert in Vice magazine in 2012. The magazine advert pictured a girl who was believed to be 16, in apparel considered to be inappropriate. However, Vice magazine said advert had no nudity and considering adverts seen in the fashion industry, this image was "tame and tasteful". The watchdog on the other hand disagreed, stating that the image had a sexual undertone and was therefore deemed to be offensive, with the Advertising Standard Authority concluding that it should not appear again and any model that appears to look like child should not be used in a sexual form (O'Reilly, 2012)

Expanding this further, these brands also need to take responsibility for the content they put out as there has been cases where the models appeared childlike, although they were confirmed to be older. An example of this was a 2017 tv advert by Pretty Little Thing which

portrayed models that appeared very young in sexually suggestive clothes. Some viewers labelled it irresponsible and suggestive, which led to pretty little thing responding. Pretty Little Thing stated that the models were 23 and 24 and the styles were on-trend apparels made for festivals. This was backed up by the Ad clearance agency, as they stated that the advert was in line with the summer spirt and the models did not appear to be children, nor were they sexualised. However, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) disagreed, stating that one of the models appeared young and her outfit was too tight, drawing attention to her bodily features. Thus, the advertising watchdog concluded that everything from the models looks to her outfits were sexually suggestive, hence it breaches the code and must not appear again (Jahshan, 2017)

Another example are posters by a British fashion brand called Nobody's Child, which was eventually banned for sexualising children. The posters in question were said to have received a number of complains, claiming that the model's expressions sexualized someone that looks like a child. With one person, reporting the name "Nobody's Child" meant the model in question was a vulnerable child. This prompted a response from Nobody's Child. They claimed the model was indeed 21 and has not been sexualised, as the brand is reflection of how their audience feel: they are not children anymore but are now adults, capable of making their own decisions rather being vulnerable. However, regardless of what Nobody's Child claimed, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) concluded that both posters were '"mildly sexually suggestive" and that the pose in the second "suggested vulnerability" despite the model being 21, as she looked younger, especially in the context of the brand name.' (Cherrington, 2016:online) Hence, they ruled it must not appear again.

In light of the above, it is therefore evident that girls are often confronted with sexualised images which gives the impression that they are effectively are groomed to see themselves as sexual objects. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997:272) conclude that 'the repeated exposure to objectifying experiences leads to self-objectification, in which girls or women internalise societal messages that sexually objectify them and others – leading them to view their own bodies as objects to be evaluated according to narrow standards of attractiveness'. Additionally, Tiggermann and Slater (2014) argue that the internet represents a great force as a sociocultural tool to optimise body image among young girls. Creating a particular standard of beautiful that people have to abide to leads to issues among girls who do not squarely fit within established norms of beauty. An example of this is the study, *Innocence Lost. The early sexualisation of tween girls in and by the media* by Clark (2008), it showed that girls display some aspects of holding themselves and other persons to a narrow ideal of beauty. By the examination of advertising images through content analysis, Clark found that many girls were objectified by the positions adopted in photos. Clark's (2008) thesis is that the imposition of sexuality stripped girls from their girlhood; media, fashion and adverts encourage girls to dress more provocatively, promoting the early adoption of sexual identity, and diminishing the expression of sexual awareness and activity.

Girls in digitalised environments are pressured to be sexually appealing without knowing the ramifications. Boys are also sexualised. In this case, this implies to having a marked abdomen (abs), along with the idea of being muscular as the most crucial aspect of the personality and the appreciation of women only through the physical aspect (Llovet Rodríguez et al., 2019). Indeed, there is a regular Media discourse around the pressure on teenage boys to be seen to be "gym-fit" (Cruz, 2014). Just like the age segmentation reviewed in Chapter 3, the line

between sexual maturity and sexual immaturity is fast becoming obscure (Cook and Kaiser, 2004). The fashion industry in its attempt to appeal to young people is clearly in danger of triggering psychological problems that are evident for the consumers of the future.

The internalisation and projection of a sexualised image, like identity construction, is an iterative process. Identity cannot be seen as static, but fluid and an active self-project that is always under construction (Giddens, 1995). The body plays an essential role in the representation of the self and the expression of identity, which is often immerse in social rules that define bodies behaviours. The Internet has become one of the main stages for through which identity projects can be performed. However, as a place of multiple and simultaneous influences can work as a dispositif for the market. Through digital spaces young people are represented, produced and reproduced continually for economic purposes, and the internalisation of what being a tween means constitutes a complex process where not only young people but also adults participate either consciously or unconsciously. It is impossible to deny the benefits of the Internet for contemporary society; however, it has become imperative to understand that it is a cultural space that influences human live beyond technological practices. As previously defined, it is a space developed for adults, which means that traditional adult-defined norms are involved in its construction. Therefore, this is a space where the performativity of identities works in close relation with the iteration of norms like it would in any other space. Although the sexualisation of girls was of course evident before the rise of the internet age, there was never a decentralised platform where not only those seeking to sell are using it, but where every person including children are obliged to use it as construct and an extension of their identity.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This dissertation sought to understand the level of engagement of young people with digital culture and the influence it had on them, so as to understand the role it plays in the way they consume fashion and construct their identity. Given the above, this thesis was designed to represent a first step in identifying the key issues and assessing what they might mean for future research and how young people's consumption might inform our broader understanding of the relationship between consumption and digital media (as discussed in Chapter 4). In order to achieve this, I paid particular attention to literature focusing on the concept of 'pleasure-seeking' (through imaginative hedonism) amongst young people, as a contributing factor to the way they consume fashion and construct their identity in this digital age. This is important to this thesis, as the way consumers access "pleasure" is changing and despite "pleasure" and its relationship to consumption being discussed by a number of scholars (Schudson, 1984; Campbell, 1987; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002), I argue it has largely been under-explored, particularly when it comes to technology and its impact on young people. There is an assumption that this generation of young people are more thoughtful about their consumption (e.g. in terms of questions of sustainability and environmental friendliness), however we can look at young people and their experiences and argue that rather than turning away from consumption, a version of young people are more critical of the over-consuming nature of the society in which they live and might have us believe that the impact of social media may well be to intensify the nature of consumption, thereby making its impact on their lives more subtle. Extending this conversation, my argument is that in a so-called, post-consumption world the pressure on young people to

consume is arguably increasingly powerful. Here, with the rise of the Internet, young people are bombarded with marketing communications (imagery/emotive words especially) on social media. These communications are often subtle in the sense that young people are almost oblivious to the fact that what they consume on social media often plays a role in their consumption and failure to attain these products, results in problems as pleasure is considered to be denied for them.

As I suggested in Chapter 1, pre-teens in the digital age have become a financial powerhouse targeted by marketers in the fashion industry (Chittenden, 2010; The Business of Fashion, 2016; Globaldata, 2018). Unlike in the past where this demographic wore clothes and accessories purchased by their parents with focus on functionality, young people currently prefer trendy fashion commodities and brands, indicating a transition towards identity definition and development based on styling themselves (Barnes and Laird, 2012). Many factors are responsible for this intensification of consumption behaviour among young people due to the accessibility provided by the Internet (Goodin et al., 2011). Hence, to investigate the influence of social media on young people fashion consumption behaviour, it was important in the context of this dissertation to develop a conceptual framework (Figure 1). This conceptual framework which includes elements such as entertainment, familiarity with celebrity and imaging were used to analyse how social media facilitates pleasure that subsequently leads to consumption.
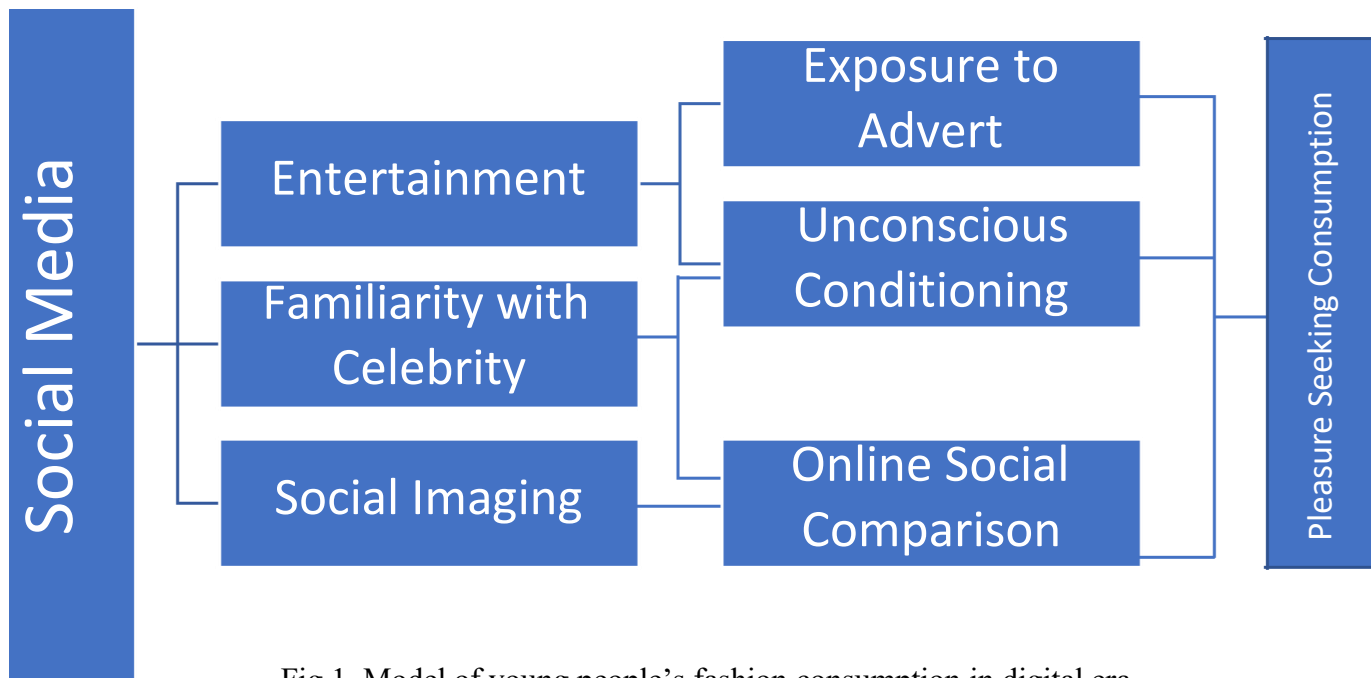
Fig 1. Model of young people's fashion consumption in digital era

Based on the aforementioned variables, this research informed us that pleasure seeking via consumption, though sometimes done unconsciously, has intensified amongst young people as a result of social media and this happens in two main ways: Unconscious Conditioning and Online Social Comparison.

Unconscious Conditioning: The exposure to marketing communications on social media has become more intense among young people. Freund (1971) states that although only a number of things can satisfy specific needs, the imaginative power is free when it comes to desires and pleasure. This makes the concept of marketing discussed by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) relevant in understanding the concept of pleasure among these consumers.

Marketing is usually considered responsible for sustaining a society of consumers who adopt a hedonistic lifestyle. Hence, O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) considered the

connection between consumer society, marketing, hedonistic lifestyle, and globalization, and the role of marketing in fuelling a hedonistic lifestyle. On similar lines, sociologists such as Campbell (1987) Bourdieu, (1984) and Schudson (1984) have argued that human desire and pleasure mainly revolve around personalised, idealised and emotionalised images of desired objects, which subsequently leads to consumption or as Campbell (1987: 528) puts it 'the pleasures of consumption reside in imagination.'

Hedonistic consumers can be observed as a pleasure-loving person or as a relatively self-indulgent person with higher levels of consumption based largely on material goals. Hedonistic consumption involves multiple senses, emotional aspects, and fantasy in the interaction of consumers with products. The element of 'fantasy' in hedonistic consumption is important as imaginary pleasure tends to attract consumers. O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) described this as a general tendency of consumers to derive pleasure from the total emotional experience rather than from the physical aspect consumption. Therefore, even though happiness and pleasure are real, the experience is being imagined in the minds of consumers. The inclusion of pleasure to the analysis of the act of consumption further expands the current understanding of consumer behaviour.

In this process, desire acts as a motivating force in contemporary consumption with each consumer undergoing an everyday experience of deriving pleasure from specific goods. Desire is associated with a powerful cyclic emotion that is pleasurable and can be discomforting when the desired object is not obtained. This analysis of pleasure and desire provided the foundation to understand consumption behaviour of young people in this digital age.

With social media, young people are continuously exposed to these marketing communications that have a significant impact on their consumption pattern. Young people tend to remain oblivious about the impact of these marketing communications on their behavioural choices. Hence, the product becomes more appealing (the mere exposure effect), creating the desire to want the rewards associated with the product, based on pleasure they imagined they would receive. Young people begin to associate the purchase of these products with the experience of pleasure that they undergo while viewing them online and fantasising about them, making their consumption pleasure oriented. Thus, unconscious conditioning can have a greater impact specifically on this cohort of very young people whose influence on purchase decisions are expanding.

Online Social Comparison: Considering the work of Meltzer (1973) discussed in Chapter 2 as well as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which describes some of the desires and needs observed in young people today. Melter (1973) states that young people go through a period of self-division, which leads to confusion about their own body image. Adding that, this confusion is partially solved by becoming part of a group and this group satisfies the two types of psychological needs in Maslow's pyramid - those of belongingness and love and those of esteem. Hence, I argue that in the present times, the same needs and desires are being met by a new medium, namely social media. Here, social media has created a space in which young people often consume in order to feel special. They also consume to reflect their social status in society and express their consumption patterns on social media. This therefore acts as means to compare oneself with peers. Similarly, these platforms act as a means for young people to emulate celebrities that they relate with. These two processes of social comparison on online media serves as a means to obtain pleasure. Young consumers are able to receive

the validation for social comparison through indicators like "likes and followings". These also contribute towards the intensification of marketing communication and social media use among young people. Therefore, with the evolution of humans needs in response to newer forms of social and economic interaction, the concept of pleasure has emerged as an important construct in understanding the consumption behaviour among young people.

6.1 Current Understanding

It has been found that the consumption of fashion plays an important role in the development of self-identity (Auty and Elliot, 1998; Bennet, 2005; Hokkanen, 2014). The consumption of certain apparel is often used to communicate personality and identity, and the relationships with fashion brands are considered particularly important in social situations (Hokkanen, 2014). Fashion brands also play a key role in building internal and external groups, with peers having the greatest influence on consumer decisions. Adults have previously been found to divide people into groups based on the brands they wear and existing stereotypical mental images (Hokkanen, 2014) At present, with the rise of social media this behaviour has also become prevalent amongst young people. As young consumers are introduced to the children's clothing market, the existing literature on the acceptance and consumption of fashion by young consumers has expanded (Rysst, 2010; Drake-Bridges and Burgess, 2010; Baker et al, 2019). Nevertheless, as there was a dearth in research on pleasure-seeking among young people, particularly pre-teens, this study has contributed to discourse around pleasure seeking through consumption by further exploring social media consumption amongst young people and highlighting this as a key and explicit focus for on-going research.

Individuals use the quest for fashion commodities to satisfy the desires that the previous generations had assuaged through epicurean pleasures. Hence, the ownership of fashion products has become a status symbol, an identity-marker and definition of self-worth (Firat, et al., 2013). On exploring entertainment as one of the variables, it was found that young people consume entertainment on social media not just for its entertainment value but also for the shopping opportunities it opens up. The availability of marketing communications across these platforms adds to the much-needed desire for youth fashion products as they are often strategically placed by marketers to reach young people. Works by Baker et al. (2019) and Northup and Liebler (2010) argue that messaging and influencers (or fashion change agents) are the two major ways through which young people are exposed to fashion products through entertainment. Additionally, young people are exposed to this materialistic culture through stereotypical representations portrayed in entertainment via marketing (Northup and Liebler, 2010 and Baker et al., 2019). Here, messaging and fashion change agents are what I argue that Bourdieu (1984) refers to as the "emotive words and images" used by marketers to attract consumers into consuming particular products. Campbell (1987) similarly argues that society is replacing the sensory pleasure of the past with imaginative hedonism. For Campbell (1987), modern hedonism is characterised by day-dreams that involves imaginative pleasure seeking and the creation of mental figures that give rise to the illusion of pleasure. And despite the person knowing that such a represntaion is false, the person feels the representation to be true. This is because imagining a situation often stimulates actual emotional experiences, and these emotional experiences are created through the marketing commuincation process to determine the buyer's preference. Hence, I argue that advertising as discussed by Campbell (1987) and Bourdieu (1984) goes some way in appealing to the emotions of consumers, making them believe that consuming a particular

product will bring them pleasure. Thus, I conclude that, messaging and fashion change agents as seen in entertainment creates a similar emotional response by using "romantic" (in other words what is exotic and idealised) materialistic culture on social media to attract young people into forms of fashion consumption.

Young people' familiarity with celebrity culture is another factor that fosters fashion consumption among young people. The internet gives a platform for young people to imitate their favourite celebrities and try to emulate them. Hence, young people are often becoming self-declared fashion change agents, constantly posting updates of their new fashion items and their accessories on their social media pages (Baker et al., 2019). Thus, fashion trends are adopted and disseminated in a social system. Young people can be identified by their role in the adoption and diffusion processes as they use new styles and influence others by introducing new styles (Baker et al., 2019). Thus, I argue that celebrity culture is used as a marketing tool to influence consumption patterns amongst young people as they are no longer so dependent on their parents for fashion choices but rather take advice from their peers online. They are influenced by forms of marketing communications on social media that are often filtered with suggestive messages about fashion items. The significance of this is that, just like with "the emotive words and images" of advertising discussed earlier, celebrity culture as seen on social media brings out desire, tempting young people to consume because they seek to replicate the pleasure, they imagined that the images they came across online will provide. Furthermore, due to familiarity with celebrity culture, young people have apparently developed a belief that the purchase of an item associated with their icon will make them similar to that icon. This is in line with the thoughts of Belk et al. (2003) who argue

that the concept of self has been equated to possessions that make children believe that self-worth must be tied to their consumption power.

Hence, I conclude that consumption amongst young people nowadays concur with some of the key aspects of modern hedonism developed by Campbell (1987), where he states that consumers are buying a specific product for the emotional experience: that in other words the notion of imaginative hedonism is more of a threat today as a result of the influence of the Internet than ever before. My suggestion is that social media provides a platform from which such acts of consumption can prove, potentially at least, to be especially powerful. Young people may imagine that acquiring products will make them popular among their peers, thus fulfilling their desire and giving them pleasure. Through the role of social media, it is therefore evident that young people do not only crave fashion items for functionality but also for the symbolic power it provides. However, this has resulted in the increased objectification of their identity and potentially, and worryingly, their bodies. This can lead to problems where young people develop dysfunctional images of the ideal body resulting in body image related disorders and depression (Klepp and Rysst, 2017).

With regard to commodification, fashion brands have designed marketing strategies to attract more consumers to their products. Generally, the commodification of young people entails the impression created among young people about the products on social media that resonate with their needs to influence purchase decisions. Some of the strategies marketers have adopted objectify young people in order that they might compete favourably in the market (Liu et al., 2018). According to research, pre-teens of the age 8 and 12 years have been used to target fellow pre-teens through marketing (Liu et al., 2018). With the increased

interaction on social media, young people obtain access to products intended for them by the markets.

Hémar-Nicolas and Rodhain (2016) argue that childhood commodification creates an aspect of viewing young people as independent consumers. The initial marketing strategies that targeted parents of young people have been replaced by those targeting young people directly. Concurrently, marketers have done a vast amount of research on the best products that can be readily sold to young people (Brookes and Kelly, 2015). This aspect is based on the notion that young people do not have a great deal of responsibilities and therefore they spend more time on social media (Blue, 2013). Thus, marketers have attempted to explore this aspect to remain relevant in the market by creating social media accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and other platforms to post fashion products that target young people, subsequently heightening young people's commodification (Hémar-Nicolas and Rodhain, 2016). When fashion products are placed on social media, it spreads through downloading, posting, and reposting, making it possible for a significant number of young people to see the product. Without prior knowledge of the negative impact of these marketing strategies, Hémar-Nicolas and Rodhain (2016) found that young people have embraced these fashion products as a means of identifying themselves with their peers. They incorporate the perception that dressing needs to be in a particular manner for them be relevant among their peers (Jones and Glynn, 2019).

6.1.1 Consequences of Consumption

Fashion is deeply intertwined with sexualisation for the marketing of fashion products and for that reason it is a particular concern that this dissertation has sought to highlight. Sexualisation has a negative impact insofar as it greatly affects the lives of young people. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that the continuous exposure of experiences of objectification leads girls to see their own body as an object that should be compared against the ideal standard of beauty: It is effectively commodified. The adoption of modern fashion among young people communicate sexuality to individuals who perceive them as sex objects. Supporting this, Clark's (2008) argues that media and fashion promote the early adoption of a sexual identity through images portrayed on advertisements. For instance, fashion products on social media appeal to young girls in such a way that they aspire to achieve certain body shapes. Consequently, the desire to dress in a particular manner has emotional and cognitive impacts on young people. This dehumanises young girls by undermining their bodies as they endeavour to dress in a particular manner to appeal to other people. I conclude that advertisements have continued to produce products that promote sexuality, especially through fashion items and marketers are positioning children and their culture so it can be sold for monetary gains (Tiggermann and Slater, 2014; Llovet Rodríguez et al., 2019) and that this is a matter that requires urgent attention if marketing is to adapt effectively to the rapidity of social change.

Social media has increased cases of commodification and the changing nature of consumption among young people. Marketers are developing social media marketing strategies which are synonymous with perceived requirements of young people. Due to their exposure to products that are made specifically for them as independent consumers, young people manage to

influence purchasing decisions. There has been a shift in decision-making on products that should be bought for young people. Initially, marketers targeted parents but now, young people are identified as individual and independent consumers with the capacity to choose. Young people are also influencing the fashion consumption of their peers. They post and upload pictures of products they believe are attractive, heightening pressure on other young people who make similar demands to their parents to own such products. Thus, if they do not conform to a particular lifestyle that is highlighted on social media, they will inevitably feel left out. Therefore, we can conclude that consumption amongst young people has been influenced by their commodification and heightened by their use of social media.

6.2 Recommendation the Regulation of Adverts and Policies

The research suggests that consideration needs to be paid to the possibility of closer regulation of young people use of social media use. One possibility here might be the placing of age restrictions on content produced by brands guilty of producing sexualised advert. Fast fashion retailers and online only brands are twice as likely to use sexualised images to promote apparel than high street brands, with differences between women empowerment and objectification of women becoming blurred.

Expanding this further, advertisers also need to take responsibility for the content they put out as they often produce sexualised adverts with models that appear childlike. To this end clear guidelines must be put in place to ensure that children are protected. This could include specifics regarding the age of the model being used and the degree to which the image of such models is sexualised.

The issue of sexualisation is especially urgent, given the potential impact it could have on teenage girls in particular. However, more broadly there is a need for the closer regulation of marketing communications aimed at young people. This thesis does not constitute some kind of a proposed shutdown of marketing to young people, but it represents a call for a more informed discourse around the potentially negative impact of particular forms of marketing communication on young people's sense of identity. For this reason, it is important that the said discourse prioritises the notion of pleasure; for by doing so it will be better be able to put itself in the shoes of young people.

Thus, I say advertisers/marketers should make sure there is no room to question the age of the model being portrayed in what may be considered inappropriate. They can do so by:

- Obtaining a number of opinions about the age of model being casted. This will ensure they have a solid ground on which to back up their claims that the model is over 18

- Obtaining and keeping a valid proof of the age of the models

- Use older models, if they believe it is necessary to sell their product in a sexualised manner or alternatively, if they intend to use younger models, they should ensure that any aspect that could be deemed sexual is removed.

Expanding this argument further, as this thesis indicates that younger people below the pre-teen age group are equally affected, the following policies would also seem to be appropriate when exploring how to deal with this epidemic:

1. The provision of specialised training to professionals involved in child education and care so that they may transmit good messages to children and build trustworthy relationships with them.

2. Educate the media and advertising industries about the impact of blatantly sexual advertising and require them to take self-regulation measures, internal codes of conduct, other voluntary actions, as well as impose sanctions on those who violate children's dignity and innocence.

3. The development and adoption of strategies that inform and educate parents about the inherent dangers of an oversexualized society (as well as raising awareness of signs and symptoms of traumatic stress) and provide them with the tools necessary to teach their children about these very sensitive topics in a constructive manner.

4. Promote and support policies, strategies, and tool aimed at increasing awareness of inappropriate oversexualization among young people and empowering them to resist such trends by supporting approaches while including their input in the development of such strategies.

6.3 Conclusion

I conclude that the intensity of the consumption in this digital age is fuelled by the search for pleasure and the acceptance and fear of rejection. The explicit incorporation of pleasure into the understanding of consumer behaviour has provided a unique perspective into young people fashion consumption. The concept of pleasure is therefore useful in uncovering newer facets of consumer behaviour that justify immediate and close attention.

6.4 Recommendations for Further Research

This thesis has demonstrated the impact of digital culture on young people fashion consumption by focusing on the imaginative nature of consumption in a rapidly changing world. In doing so, it suggests that the notion of pleasure as a concept can better expand our understanding of consumer behaviour among young people. It thus provides a new, or at least a revitalised, lens to examine existing literature on consumer behaviour. Although, due to Covid-19 the inclusion of an empirical approach was not possible for the purposes of this research, so that from a practical point of view the extent of its validity can be fully explored. On reflection, despite this limitation, the research provided the opportunity to develop a framework on which to thoroughly analyse and understand variables which contribute to the phenomena, that is pleasure seeking. Although, I believe a solid case has been developed, it leaves us with more questions regarding this phenomenon. It raises questions regarding the role of economic factors in mediating the relationships explored thus far. It also raises questions regarding the use of pleasure in forms of marketing communications on social media, in other words, how advertisers make forms of consumption appear uniquely pleasurable. Thus, we need to further examine various facets of this phenomena to fully

understanding its dynamics and evolution. Similarly, this examination cannot be restricted to empirical analysis of young people's purchase behaviour. It has to further extend to incorporate an analysis of marketing communications on social media to understand the developing strategies of marketing companies in attracting young people to facilitate pleasure specifically: for it is in pleasure that the ideological power of consumption might be said to reside.

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