

# Fashion, Politics & Marketing/PR

By

Aregnaz Harutyunyan

Presented to the Department of English & Communication  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia  
Yerevan, Armenia

May 21, 2018

## **Abstract**

Fashion and Politics have been inseparable in the past few years. High fashion brands, from the well-established ones to the very upstart fashion houses have been making political statements in various forms. The aim of this capstone project is to find out some of the reasons that might be pushing fashion into becoming so involved with politics. The following capstone project aims to discover the many ways that various political issues have become a new collection theme, a march motivation or a social media hashtag in the fashion industry. Throughout this journey of looking through very distinct examples of integrating politics into fashion both from well-established and upstart fashion brands, the project will try to look at some of the motivations behind their actions. Due to the collective data information that included, academic research, interviews and a survey, the project concludes that the act of joining a political movement in the fashion industry, especially when it is a marketing strategy instead of being a genuine claim, does not guarantee the success of the fashion house in any sphere.

## **Introduction**

As much as we avoid being involved in politics, nowadays it is almost impossible to completely ignore the subject, as it's very much a part of our everyday lives. And when it comes to our daily routines we can't help, but make fashion choices, whether good or bad, fashion itself is a phenomenon that is just as involved in our lives as politics is. Finally, when it comes to PR and marketing, we are the ultimate 'victims.' Thus, without our efforts or desire, we become

involved in these three fields one way or another. So, what if these three aspects morph into one and start influencing not only one another, but also the consumers. There have been several outstanding political statements made in the fashion world in the past, however the last few years have been quite revolutionary for the fashion industry which perhaps includes the PR and marketing professionals working in the field as well. The reasons that pushed politics into fashion are as diverse as the fashion industry itself. Fashion brands became so involved with politics that it seemed as everyone was following the same stream, which in a lot of cases became tiring and disappointing for consumers and fashion enthusiasts.

## **Literature Review**

As simple as it may sound, we are all heavily involved with fashion, at least on an unconscious level and as a matter of fact fashion is involved with us and different aspects of the individual and the society as a whole. Throughout the history of fashion, the world has encountered drastic and significant changes in clothing, trends and the way it is perceived, due to various factors. One of the major influences on the world of fashion and its evolution is politics. Perhaps, fashion itself has some influence on our beliefs and views on political cases. These two worlds are sometimes so involved with each other, that many times fashion has ‘talked’ politics during major political events without us noticing.

Since political influences in the fashion world and vice versa started occurring centuries ago, the relationship between the two worlds has been at its peak roughly since 2016. In other words, the ‘political inspiration’ of the world of fashion and the worldwide fashion at the moment, is no

other than Donald Trump himself. One way to thoroughly explore this modern phenomenon is to go back all the way to the history of political involvements in fashion trends and garment design, to our days' escalation of the situation.

Articles discussing the current influences of politics on fashion and vice versa have been trending in famous magazines and newspapers for a while now. However, there have been if not many, but few scholars have explored this phenomenon way before things escalated in terms of hundreds of brands making political statements.

Joshua Miller's article, called "Fashion and Democratic Relationships," published in the journal called 'Polity' takes a peak at the different definitions of democracy, political ideologies, fashion and the ways these can be interconnected to one another. Miller thoroughly discusses the ways fashion affects the communication between citizens, which on its own either creates or ends a possible political bond. The article doesn't simply explore the one definition of the word 'democracy' that we are all so familiar with. Just like, democracy's main principles include the right of free speech, self-expression and a huge focus on the individual, democracy in fashion translates into self-expression, freedom of individual style as well as an opportunity to express political views through clothing pieces and accessories. The article further expands on the subject of individual style, body and appearance by discussing some intimate areas of these three components. The research done by the author has also discovered evidence through which, Miller proposes the idea of fashion and social class, in other words, the many ways fashion indicates social status and as a result of which fashion and equality simply cannot be in harmony. In a lot of ways Miller's approach to the subject of fashion and politics is unique and solely research and theory based, which certainly is a great way of getting started on the relationship between fashion and politics.

Angela McRobbie's article, "Bridging the Gap: Feminism, Fashion and Consumption" published in the journal of the "Feminist Review" takes a narrower look on the subject by looking at the ways feminism, fashion and its consumption are interconnected. The following article is a one based more on history, which certainly is another useful way to do a more thorough analysis on the research topic. When it comes to the relationship between fashion and politics, more than one aspects are involved. McRobbie touches upon a couple of the political cases that have influenced fashion as well its production and consumption throughout history. The article historically refers to the ways feminism and the role of women has managed to revolutionize fashion and its accessibility by first making a move in other aspects and movements, such as literature and the modernist movement. The author also discusses the problems regarding women of color and their 'luck' with fashion that were actual back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The capstone of the research topic, presumably will touch upon on all the possible political problems that surround the fashion industry as well as the ones that push the industry to 'raise a voice.'

Frederic Godart's article, "The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity" published in the "International Journal of Fashion Studies" focuses more on the exploration of the fashion brands, the external influences and oligarchy of the industry. However, it does also refer to the aspect of politics and the way it 'changes the game' in the industry, along with other influences, such as culture, economics and the elite. It closely discusses the fashion capitals and by referring to academic research and political theorists introduces new political terms and phenomena that the industry cannot escape from. Thus, Godart's indefinite conclusion bases on the fact that political and economic powers are too powerful for fashion industry to stay out of.

Katie Weiner's article called "Dressed to Express: Fashion's Role as a Political Medium" published on harvardpolitics.com is a very recent source taking a closer look at the more modern problem with fashion and its connection to politics. Weiner's article shortly refers to some of the many cases when fashion and politics became one in the past two years. Weiner's article is more detailed due to the fact that she manages to not only focus on well-established fashion brands and their political activities, but also laconically discusses a few other aspects of fashion's correlation with politics, such as the ways colors and accessories are an indicator of specifically the identity of the generation of millennials. This ultimately connects to Joshua Miller's analysis of fashion and democratic theories in his "Fashion and Democratic Relationships" article.

Vanessa Friedman's New York Times article called "When Politics Became a Fashion Statement" takes a similar approach to the modern topic as Weiner did. Friedman undoubtedly explores the events that involved fashion and politics as a whole, on a wider format. In other words, the following article mentions some of the most popular political problems that have caused an outrage in the industry for the past few years. Since the research topic, as mentioned is going to take a thorough look at each and every individual political case, the article is undoubtedly a trustworthy source to get short and informative general knowledge on Black Lives Matter, Muslim Women, Hillary Clinton and their relation to fashion. The author also doesn't discriminate against more affordable fashion brands, by including possibly brands that have reported a history of political activities ranging from luxury, high-street to affordable.

Laura Beltran-Rubio's article published on the website of "The Fashion Studies Journal" called "The Power of Pink and a Bloodstained Black Lives Matter Movement" specifically focuses on two political movements that were accompanied by particular fashion elements. The author pinpoints the cases of the Black Lives Matter and the "Pink" or feminist protests. The author

thoroughly discusses the movements from the political aspect, as well as takes a look at the media coverage referring to the protests. Of course, the article includes an analysis of the fashion elements involved in these two political movements, such as the colors and the accessories that the protesting crowds were 'covered' in and the significance of their symbolism both in and outside of the protest.

The Fashion Law followed the media trend of finally analyzing the overflow of politics in the fashion industry by publishing an article called "One of the Biggest Trends in Fashion Right Now? Taking Sides." Although the approach of the article is more on the harsh side, since it directly addresses the concern of the research topic, which is whether the massive 'promotion' of political cases and movements in the fashion industry is about going with the flow and making it another 'fashion trend.' The article incorporates new cases and brands that have considered to take the step and contribute to the 'party', which in this case was the famous retail company, Amazon. Perhaps, this articles also tried to explore whether or not becoming political for high fashion brands is following just another trend, except for the factor of brand and sales promotion.

The correlation between the two very different worlds and industries is inevitable. And, the following argument as well as the exploration of the one that missions to measure the genuineness of the fashion industry taking action for and within politics is supported by each and every article discussed above. The different approaches of each and every article equally contribute to the formation of the narrative of the capstone, by providing the necessary background, historical, theoretical, analytical base full of useful examples from both neutral and critical viewpoints. The further research of trying to find out whether the use of politics on the runway or in fashion world in general is a trend, a promotions or a 'go with the flow' strategy

will contribute to these sources and complete the cycle of historical scholarly articles reflecting on the topic as well as the modern conclusions.

## **Central Research Question**

Fashion industry has been highly involved in politics and political issues in the past few years. The aim of the capstone research is to find out whether both well-established and upstart high fashion brands are being genuine in their excessive political claims in social media, during protests and on the runway. The main research questions of the project include:

- Are high fashion brands being genuine in their political claims made in the past few years?
- Are well-established high fashion brands making highly political statements to maintain their reputation and avoid judgement?
- Are upstart high fashion brands trying to gain popularity and attention with their political claims?
- Will collections inspired by current political issues maintain popularity among consumers on the long-term?

## **Methodology**

The main research questions of this project will be answered through thorough usage of different methodologies, such as interviews, surveys and data collection.

## **Interviews**

Email interviews have been conducted with various representatives of the fashion industry to discover several things that will contribute to the formation of the research for the capstone. The interviews were done in the form of emails, because the individuals that were interviewed were representatives of different countries and cultures, and live outside of Armenia. The people that have been interviewed are fashion industry professionals from different fashion companies (magazines, online communities/websites, brands). PR and marketing professionals working both in and outside of the fashion industry also did provide opinions as well as professional expertise exploring on the subject of how massive political promotions for brands can affect the company in different aspects. The interviews conducted with various entrepreneurs in the fashion industry aim at answering questions about how and what fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims and how right it is to do so from an ethical point of view. All people interviewed provided opinions on the merchandise inspired by politics and the longevity of these products.

## **Survey**

The survey is intended to help provide answers to the question of whether or not the current political statements made in the industry are genuine and if the merchandise inspired by politics will remain its popularity and sales. The survey was meant and was spread to a specific audience, individuals with certain knowledge and passion for the high fashion world. Due to the survey, the capstone will have a broader look and more diverse opinions on the subject of fashion and politics.

## **Data Collection**

The project is going to include charts and graphs depicting the financial aspect of the fashion brands' annual reports. By looking through some high fashion brands' annual reports and data, the project will have a strong base to conclude certain things, such as whether the politics used in the PR/marketing strategies of these brands or even in case of the political statements being genuine, the brands have increased or decreased their sales. Analyzing these data will contribute to giving a more precise answers with reliable sources to some of the questions that the research is aiming to answer.

## **Body**

The history of politicized fashion is as ancient as the art of fashion and dressing itself. Perhaps, the symbolism of colors and styles deliberately giving out political messages, preferences and views has been around many centuries. However, political statements in the high fashion world that are initiated and made by the designers and the creative directors themselves is a relatively recent phenomenon. One of the most popular political issues that is constantly elucidated in the fashion industry (not only in high fashion, but also in high-street, fast fashion) is feminism.

The article by Angela McRobbie called “Bridging the Gap: Feminism, Fashion and Consumption” (McRobbie, 1997) is a very compelling source that reflects on the history of feminism, while touching upon the aspect of fashion production and its consumption, specifically by women. The author discusses major historical facts and figures regarding women in various fields, such as poetry and their inevitable role in the rise of modernity. It also mentions about the unequal opportunities regarding fashion consumption for women of color and other races in general. Fashion, being an industry focused on females and femininity, as McRobbie claims has gone through a series of changes and revelations as the role of women did, both in the sphere of consumption, design and production ethics.

Despite the fact that the following article discusses the phenomena of feminism and fashion from a different perspective and an industry, it is still vital to depict the image of modern feminism and the way it influences fashion and vice versa, by reflecting upon the history of the connection between feminism and fashion.

The mutual influence of feminism and fashion on each other is a significant aspect in history. As a matter of fact, the very first political statements to be known in the fashion

industry had a lot to do with feminism and women's rights. The 20<sup>th</sup> century for women and their role in society was revolutionary.

Possibly one of the first important and major political involvements with fashion marked at the very start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The changes in the political arena for women and people of color was not only contributed by literature, music and visual arts, but also fashion, which is no less of an art form

After Emmeline Pankhurst established the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903, in Manchester, it contributed to women, in particular feminists starting to take action. All of this lead to suffragettes protesting and marching for women's right to vote in 1913. It was during these protests that women started wearing white and made a major fashion statement in a political situation. Perhaps, wearing trousers in the 1920s became the next biggest political move through the help of fashion. Women started rebelling and fighting for their rights through clothes and fashion.

After World War I, Coco Chanel creates the power-suit for women, the two-piece knitted suit. Shortly after this, women finally get the right to vote and this marks the future of feminism, women's freedom of choice and sexuality.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The first women's tuxedo to be introduced was by Yves Saint Laurent in the second half of the twentieth century. Perhaps the world-known couturier didn't only open just one door for women leading them to the potential of having more power. The simple 'act' of a woman wearing a clothing piece that has only been worn by men before was liberating, empowering. It sparked freedom and confidence. It symbolized the freedom of women and the equality between the sexes. This iconic YSL tuxedo made its first appearance in 1966 during one of his couture shows, it became a revolutionary clothing piece, morphing the worlds together; fashion and politics.

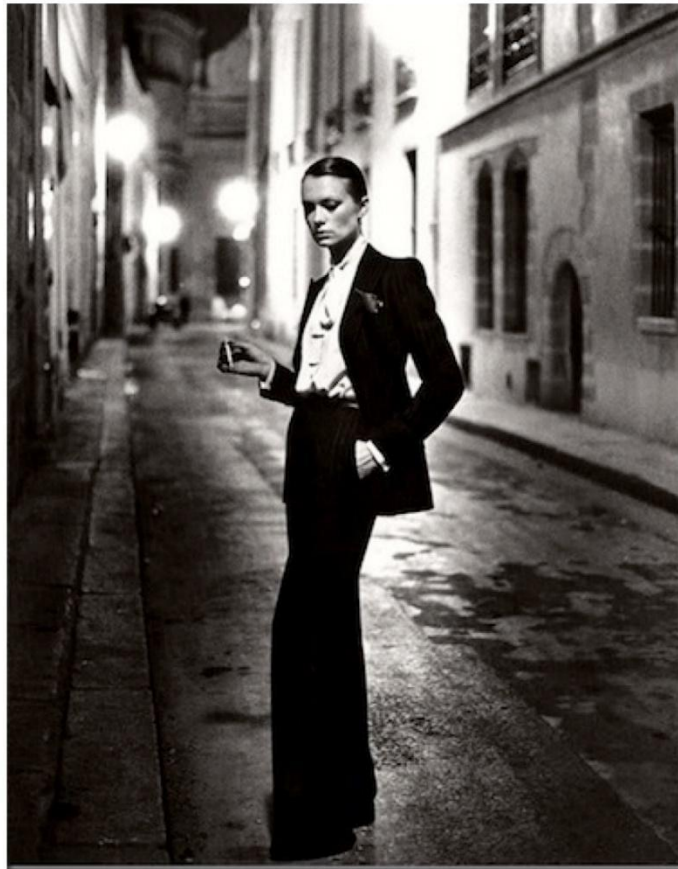


Figure 3

Coco Chanel was and will remain indeed not only a fashion industry icon, but also a feminist who promoted the power of women and encouraged them to embrace their rights and freedom. Saint Laurent was more focused on the embracement of a woman's sensuality and at the same time aspired to create fashion for women that would make them feel powerful and sexy.

Coco Chanel and Yves Saint Laurent however were some of the pioneers in the industry with 'subtle' political fashion pieces. Katharine Hamnett is actually considered to be the pioneer to design the slogan t-shirts. Clearly, the t-shirts designed by her had very straightforward political messages all over them.



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

Katharine Hamnett's fashion included direct political messages. Most of her slogans were related to the current political issues or events taking place in the UK and in the world. Every slogan t-shirt designed by her had a specific message referring to a particular political problem.

Many designers pioneered in making political statements in their fashion collections and inspired the future designers in a lot of ways. Perhaps, the current involvement of politics in high fashion is much larger, however the initial statements made by various designers will always remain iconic and special. With that being said, Jean Paul Gaultier caused an outrage and made history by putting male models in skirts for his 1984 show in Paris called "And God Created Men." It is hard to impress the audience with something like this in the modern times, but back in 1984 the show got many responses, most of them were negative at the time. While many editors and fashion critics considered this a political claim or an establishment, Gaultier himself denied the politicized aspect of his show claiming that he was inspired by different cultures, the ones where the man skirt was a part of the traditional attire. After this case, however, many modern designers have included skirts in their menswear collections, such as Vivienne Westwood, Rick Owens, Comme des Garcons and Walter Van Beirendonck.



Figure 7

Alexander McQueen, being one of the most talented and iconic designers of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century has managed to make some political statements too. In 1995, McQueen's Fall/Winter collection called "Highland Rape." During the show, the models were bruised, with 'strange' facial expressions and not typical runway catwalk. McQueen tried to 'protest' the societal image and the objectified attitude towards women as well as portrayed his dissatisfaction with certain historical events, more specifically the inhumane crimes that England had committed towards Scotland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Figure 8

Before the whole wave of making political claims in fashion industry, these previous statements had shaped the industry as well as contributed to the solutions of certain political issues and at least given food for thought to the society. Most of these statements, however, will always remain iconic, no matter how many brands continue the movement of being political in certain aspects of high fashion.

In 2000 Hussein Chalayan makes a statement again, only this time a very political one in his AW00 show called "Afterwords." This collection as well as the show were dedicated to some his personal experiences and the Kosovo war. The setup for the collection included a room full of personal items of the designer. The collection mainly consisted of neutral colors, with little or no significant details or designs, which on its own can send a certain message. The final seconds of the presentation, however 'did their magic' as four models turned the chairs set up in the room into literal clothing pieces. Chalayan set up a strong political statement in a subtle yet powerful way, by using metaphors, symbolism and of course art.



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

When it comes to our modern day, relatively recent cases of brands making political statements exist. Walter Van Beirendonck is certainly a pioneer. In 2014, when political fashion was yet to make a comeback, it was Walter Van Beirendonck that marked one of the current iconic and important political statements exactly on the runway. During the Fall/Winter 2014 menswear show, this brand's main political statement was the infamous feather headdress/hat that had the 'Stop Racism' writing on it.



Figure 14

This head piece not only sparked interest amongst fashion critics and audiences and received a lot of attention, but also became a modern base for the political statements that were going to be made in the future. It is fair to conclude that Beirendonck and little or no intentions of making this statement a marketing strategy, since the brand has always been outspoken and unconventional in its designs and collections.

One of the most famous and quite recent runway scandal was during A/W 2015 Rick Owens menswear show in Paris. What Owens did was something never done before and perhaps very brave. Some of the models showcasing the collection pieces had holes in their underwear and some of them no underwear at all with pieces showing more than the eye of the fashion public was ready for or used to. Rick Owens has always been an individual, always trying to break a certain stereotype. This case might not completely belong to the case of making a political statement, but rather a social issue or a taboo. However, it is debatable. There are not a lot of restrictions these days on what social issues are considered political and what aren't. Rick Owens simply referred to his collection, more specifically the 'full frontals' as an act towards using nudity as power and the symbolism of liberation and independence that it gives.

When it comes to fashion and politics and the way they coexist, there are no limits. While, the past cases of fashion becoming political was done mostly on the runway, in the visual, creative way - the options for today's brands to show their political awareness has extended. This is undoubtedly due to the technological advancements and the rise of social media. A brand can show support to a political issue either in a subtle way or in a very 'loud', noticeable way. Many high fashion brands built their brand and their name on their active involvement with politics and 'speaking up', while others chose to join this

movement to avoid possible public criticism and maintain a certain image that was setup for the brands years ago. It is interesting to observe how a high fashion brand, especially a well-established one can hold on to their public image and reputation, but at the same time show their awareness about what is happening in the world of politics. Depending on the methods and the ways of making political statements brands can change a lot. It is a responsible step for a well-established brand to come up with a collection that includes politicized garment designs, while speaking up during interviews or on social media has become a relatively 'safe' way of attaching the brand to the massive movement of using political messaging in fashion without making drastic changes to the brand. Another way of showing support or disagreement with certain laws or stereotypes for fashion houses became the 'trend' of using specific accessories during their shows or joining protests to make a statement. Thus, there is not one way of becoming involved with politics. The flexibility of options today allows brands to incorporate something new without risking their public image or even sales.

Perhaps, there is a difference between making a political statement and simply joining the 'trend' or the movement that is becoming political, even if it is done on the runway. Certain well-established high fashion brands have made political statements that have shaped their brand and the history. These brands have managed to create a world-known fashion house while making some major political statements during controversial times, when the world was not used to the fashion-politics duo.

## Well-established Political brands

Jean Paul Gaultier being one of the most iconic designers in the modern world has had his fair share of scandals, political cases, controversies associate and revolving around the brand. Gaultier is a worldwide famous French designer famous for his unorthodox haute couture and prêt-à-porter collections. Jean Paul Gaultier as a fashion house has been known for supporting and embracing androgyny, male femininity and most of all 'shocking' and bold pieces. Gaultier is no stranger to criticism due to his controversial and provocative shows that he debuted over the course of many years. From using religion inspired couture dresses to putting male models in dresses and skirts, this man has managed to make many political statements. Gaultier embraces and supports the unusual. Religion, sexuality and gender identity are considered to be the main themes that the designer has and is still focusing on. One huge controversy however was Gaultier's announcement about dressing the First lady of the United States, Melania Trump in 2016. Many designers from high fashion houses made political statements by telling the media whether or not are willing to dress Melania Trump. Jean Paul Gaultier, being one of the most outspoken designers spoke positively about dressing Melania Trump, telling that politics should be separated from fashion, states Heather Saul in her article called "Melania Trump: Jean Paul Gaultier says he would be happy dress future First Lady." Considering the fact that many of Gaultier's shows have sent certain political messages whether or not they were completely intentional from his side, his comment about detaching politics from fashion is quite contradictory. As it was mentioned before, Jean Paul Gaultier avoids the words politics and prefers to label his runway provocations or scandals as cultural inspirations and statements. Gaultier and his brand are always

unapologetic, expressive and brave and even though the designer denies his political intentions, every statement he makes both on and off the runway, seem to be genuine and not driven from a marketing or sales perspective.

Stella McCartney being one of the most outspoken and famous faces in the fashion world today has built a fashion brand that followed a certain ideology and made political statements during and before everyone else started doing it. McCartney's way of speaking up about certain issues that could possibly be considered political is somewhat different. Being a vegetarian herself the designer has used only non-toxic materials throughout the whole course of her brand. McCartney raises issues of environmentalism not only as an individual, but as well as a high fashion brand. Since the research is going to discuss the aspect of sales and how political statements made by brands can have a certain effect on them, it is important to mention Rhonda Richford's article published in hollywoodreporter.com called "At Paris Fashion Week Stella McCartney is 'Woke,' Giambattista Valli Responds to the Right." "But at the moment, McCartney is in negotiations to buy back 50 percent of her company from Kering. The luxury giant also owns Gucci, whose more-is-more-is-more aesthetic has been raking in the cash for the conglomerate while sales of McCartney's more restrained vision are said to be flat," states the author. This is a simple indication of how the industry is full of 'double-standards.' As much as the overwhelming politicization of fashion today raises questions of genuineness and marketing strategies, this proves that making a political statement of any kind doesn't guarantee high sales or a good reputation for a brand.

Dior has been 'on top of its game' in terms of morphing fashion with some serious political issues, more specifically feminism. Of course, this is the case for the brand since Maria Grazia Chiuri took over the brand and became the Creative Director of one of the most famous and

iconic high fashion brands - Dior. Grazia's work at Dior has received as much criticism as it has been praised by fashion critics, fashion enthusiasts and the general public. Maria Grazia Chiuri became the creative director of Dior in 2016, thus changing the image and the philosophy of the brand. Dior transformed into the most vocal well-established brand that was unapologetically making political statements on the runway and not only. With that being said, the main political issue or more specifically movement that the brand is focused on supporting is feminism. It didn't take Chiuri too long to create a garment that would shortly become one of the trendiest pieces in street fashion and not only. The infamous Dior t-shirt with the writing 'We should all be feminists' on it was everywhere.



Figure 15

Chiuri definitely made a case of being the first female designer for Dior. This one particular t-shirt started to show everywhere, in real life, during fashion weeks worn by celebrities and models, on social media on hundreds of bloggers and even on Harper's Bazaar magazine's cover.



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

This famous t-shirt was actually inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's essay and TEDx talk of the same name. Dior is still continuing to be on top of politics with its each and every new collection. It seems as if Chiuri has completely changed the face of this iconic brand and a lot of fashion critics and enthusiasts aren't happy with it. Robin Givhan's Washington Post article called "Dior slaps a slogan on a T-shirt and tries to pass it off as feminism." The whole article is written in an ironic tone and is meant to show that simply by using a book name or a quote on a

t-shirt Chiuri doesn't make any significant impact, which of course is debatable judging from the success of just one t-shirt and how it went viral. Givhan harshly criticizes Dior's Spring/Summer 2018 collection and its main theme by stating the following, "For her first show, she quoted from the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's essay "We should all be feminists." She even emblazoned T-shirts with that phrase. So it was not surprising that guests would arrive Tuesday to find a copy of historian Linda Nochlin's 1971 art history essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists?" on their seat. In her treatise, Nochlin didn't try to catalogue overlooked or undervalued female artists but instead poked at the patriarchy by questioning the parameters that define "great" and "art.""



Figure 20

Maria Grazia took everything to another level with Dior's Fall 2018 Ready-To-Wear collection. When everyone thought Dior had used most possible ways of making political statements, Chiuri presented a collection with not only politicized garment pieces but she did it in such a politicized environment that it was a little bit more than overwhelming in terms of visuals.



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

Avery Matera talks about the interior design for this show and breaks down the details in the article “Dior’s Set Was (Literally) the Biggest Political Statement of the Season So Far,” published on fashionunfiltered.com. “Located just outside the lush, snow-covered gardens of the Musée Rodin, Maria Grazia Chiuri presented her latest collection for Dior in a bespoke structure completely plastered with vintage posters, magazine clippings, and quotes from pro-feminist rallies and movements from the mid-20th century,” describes Matera in short.

---

There are absolutely countless ways of showing support for a certain political issue or being vocal about it. All of it depends on the issue and the statement itself.

While Chiuri shows her support and emphasizes the importance of feminism and women in the modern world, Vivienne Westwood took her own measures when it came to being politically correct on the runway. Vivienne Westwood is one of the biggest names in the fashion industry that has been making strong and straightforward political statements without denying its intentions. It is almost like politics is rather a regular theme for Vivienne Westwood. It replaces a signature style or a design for this high fashion brand. Vivienne Westwood is a well-established high fashion British brand by Vivienne Westwood herself.

Indeed, one of the first and the biggest controversial political statements made by Vivienne Westwood was in 1977. Westwood designed a t-shirt which included more than one political and provocative image on it. The t-shirt had a red swastika on it, an image of the Christ on the cross inverted, lyrics from the famous punk rock band ‘Sex Pistols’ and finally the word ‘Destroy’ in capital letters. This was when the public as well as the brand itself were in the punk phase. This kind of politically themed, punk t-shirts became a staple of the brand for a while.

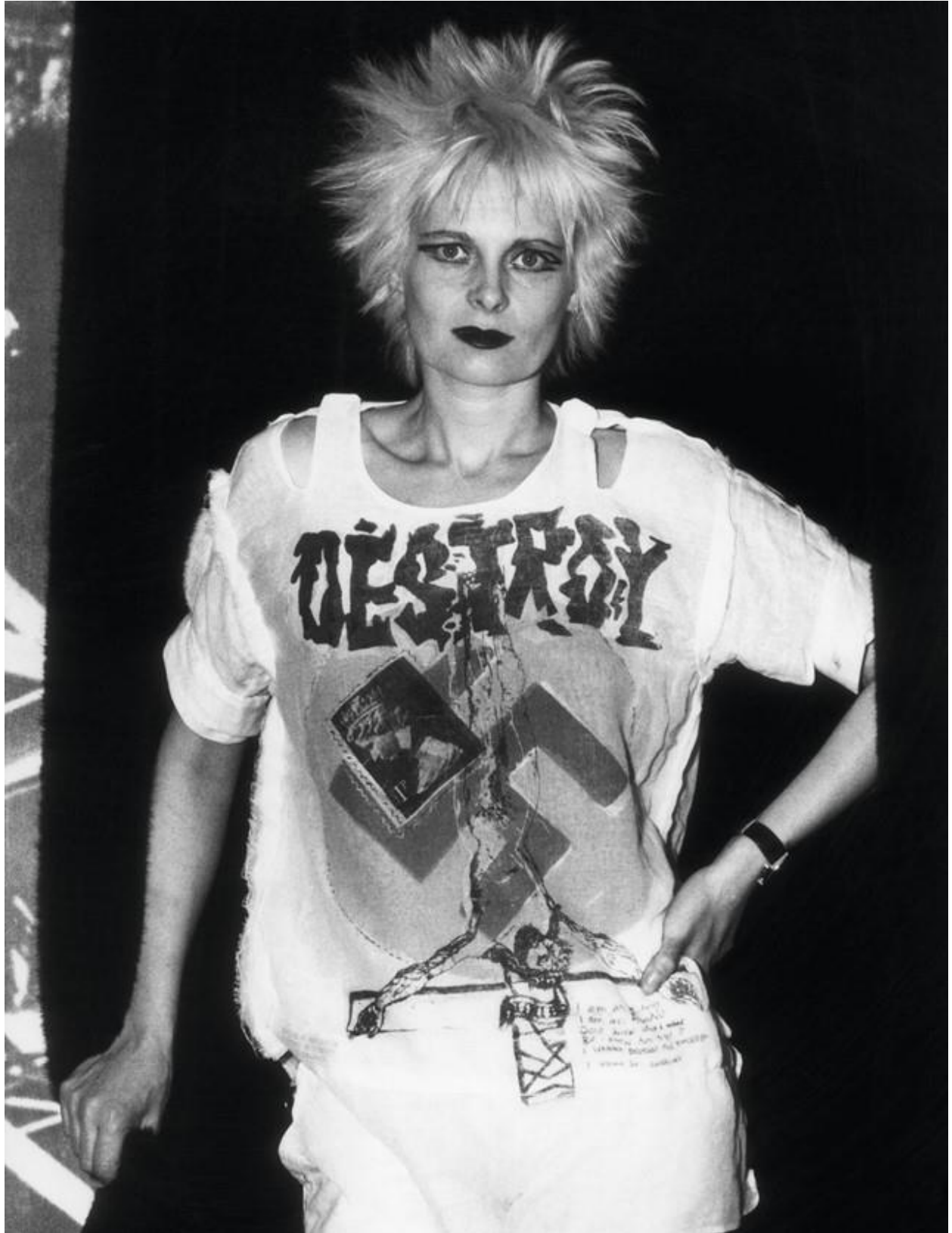


Figure 24

Westwood being a controversial brand, however focused on many different issues and every time the designer was going to make a political statement, it was something new and relevant. Vivienne Westwood has shown her support and awareness for many social and political issues not only on the runway, but by protesting, by the fashion campaigns of the brand, by donating money to a cause and individually speaking up. For more than a decade the brand has been collaborating with the International Trade Center's Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI). In, 2011 Vivienne Westwood launched a collection along with the campaign that was mainly created and presented in Africa. "The dame designed a range of bags, which were made by women in the capital city under ethical labor conditions (using discarded materials such as safari tents and old shirts)," describes Jamie Waters in his Dazed article called "Vivienne Westwood's Ten Political Campaigns." Westwood being an environmental activist not only donated around £300,000 to the Green Party in 2011, but also empowered women living under harsh conditions from developing countries.



Figure 25

Some of the other important statements made by Vivienne Westwood, include the t-shirts made in 2005 with 'I'M NOT A TERRORIST, please don't arrest me' printed on them in support of innocent Muslims that are usually targeted by police.



Figure 26

Westwood standing for diversity made political statements both during menswear and womenswear shows. “The worst evil of propaganda is non-stop distraction. This comes in the form of consumption, which includes bombardment by news – lies – and media opinion,” stated Vivienne Westwood during her Fall/Winter 2005 “Propaganda” collection show.



Figure 27

Unlike the fashion houses and designers mentioned below, Tommy Hilfiger being a very popular brand these days has certainly involved his brand to a certain extent, however it was never something that reflected on the history of the brand or its ideology. There are a few contradictory points in the statements made by Tommy Hilfiger in the past few years. In the TommyxGigi 2017 runway show, the designer took a step and joined the wave of making political statements on the runway by using white bandanas. The models were wearing white bandanas around their wrists. The famous white bandanas that were everywhere during fashion

weeks in 2017 were symbols of protesting and going against Donald Trump's immigration law. One important thing that does not seem to add up to the willingness of the brand and the designer to support political protests is the fact that back in 2016 Tommy Hilfiger himself expressed interest in dressing the First Lady Melania Trump while many designers refused to do so. He told the press that fashion shouldn't become 'political', while his future political statement was far from being non-political and quite directly connected to Melania Trump. As a matter of fact, Tommy Hilfiger simply could have viewed the act of dressing Melania Trump as non-political, while his 2017 show statement is definitely a political act. These two cases could separate the individual from the brand and vice versa.



Figure 28

Calvin Klein is not a world-known high fashion brand to make constant political statements on or outside the runway. The year 2017, however took a different turn for this brand as well. Calvin Klein's Fall 2017 Ready-To-Wear collection show was a debut of the brand's new chief creative officer Raf Simons. Clearly the designer that had before worked for many high fashion houses decided to use the opportunity to speak up about the political situation in 2017, which was mainly about the presidency of Donald Trump. Simons sent the guests notes that stating the following; "Unity, inclusion, hope and acceptance: Join us at Calvin Klein in wearing the white bandanna. #tiedtogether. Even though, the collection in terms of visuals didn't include any political messaging or signs, the show was presented while David Bowie's "This is Not America" song was playing at the venue. Perhaps, this is a subtle way of reflecting on a political issue or a situation, but especially for a brand like Calvin Klein Raf Simons caught the attention of the media, even though already many well-established and upstart high fashion brands were making political statements during New York Fashion Week specifically.

During New York Fashion Week 2017 and not only some other designers/brands that made political statements include; Brandon Maxwell, Thakoon, Missoni, Mara Hoffman, Marchesa, Jeremy Scott, Philip Plein and Prabal Gurung with the infamous 'The Future is Female' t-shirts.



Figure 29

There are no rules of making political statements and making one doesn't necessarily make the brand genuine or caring. When it comes to politics, Prada has been one of the iconic high fashion houses that has been very neutral, without any political claims on the runway at least. Does this make Prada a brand that doesn't care about what is happening in the world? The creative director and the legendary woman who established this brand is living proof that one's views and activities do not have to reflect their work and vice versa. Miuccia Prada is one of the biggest feminist names in the fashion industry. Prada's runway had been considered to be very silent and too fashion focused over the years. Brand's 2017 Autumn/Winter runway show at Milan reminded the world of how important women are for the brand as well as the world.

“Fashion's premier feminist, Miuccia Prada, timed this return to form to perfection. In a season when slogans of female empowerment are a catwalk must-have and movie stars have been ripped off moodboards in favour of suffragettes, Prada have come roaring back to life in Milan. Her recent collections have lacked a little urgency, but this one was a punchy reminder that Prada was using fashion as a way of talking about the female experience many years before it became fashionable,” wrote Jess Cartner Morley in an article published in the Guardian, called “Milan fashion week: Miuccia Prada returns to feminist form.” What Prada was reflection on through this collection was the power of women, romance, seduction and the way these are related to feminism. There were no direct quotes or ‘in your face’ visuals raising these questions in this collection, but rather delicate details reflecting on history and feminism.

---



Figure 30

The amount of political statements made in the fashion industry in the past few years has been almost overwhelming, reaching to a certain peak. Indeed, well-established high fashion houses alone couldn't make headlines related to political fashion trend so much. One of the interesting observations that can be made while researching the keywords politics and fashion is how most well-established fashion brands had made political statements throughout the history, when these kind of steps were very risky and new to this art form. The amount of upstart fashion brands making political statements on and off the runway, especially as brand debut or a signature is more than one can possibly imagine. Perhaps, the latest events in the political arena were also an opportunity for brands that aren't necessarily upstart, but less known to the general public, to show their involvement with these issues, perhaps by inviting attention to their brands while

possibly increasing their sales. Joanthan Simkhai didn't hold back his political views during New York Fashion week in 2017 and showed his support for planned parenthood and feminism.



Figure 31

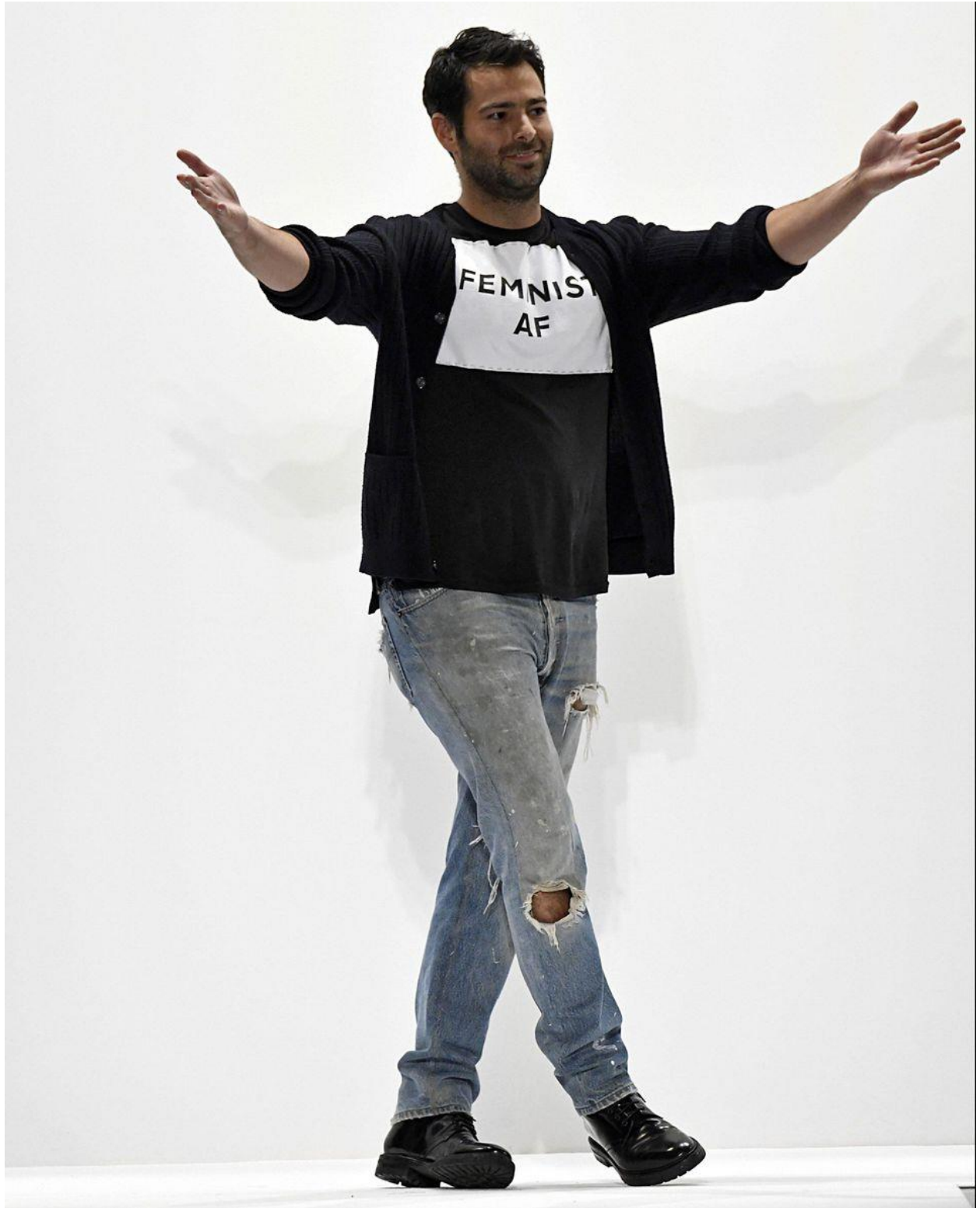


Figure 32

Some of the strongest and memorable political statements in New York Fashion Week made by relatively upstart high fashion brands included the playing a song with strong language and political notes during Chromat's show, writing political messages on models' underwear at Cushnie et Ochs show, "We are all human beings" shirts by Creatures of Comfort, protest signs at Adam Lippes' show, "Make America New York" hats at Public School's show and more slogan t-shirts. It seems as if most political statements made by fashion brands were concentrated at New York, which is true, however they were a few British brands, such as Ashish that certainly focused their whole collection on political messages and statements.



Figure 33

### **Well-established & Upstart Apolitical Brands**

With the rising trend of making political statements as a high fashion house, the risk of gaining or losing a certain reputation is 50-50. While upstart brands can contribute to their public image and fame with political statements, not every well-established house can 'afford' to make

political statements as they please. Perhaps, not making any political statements or responding to a certain issue these days could also have a negative effect on the brand. There is not much discuss about apolitical well-established brands, but name a number of them such as, Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Armani, Fendi, Yves Saint Laurent, Azzedine Alaia, Givenchy, Valentino, Salvatore Ferragamo, Carolina Herrera, Isabel Marant, Helmut Lang, Celine and many others.

While there can be as many well-established high fashion brands that are either political or apolitical, the list of upstart brands not going with the flow and coming up with seriously politicized collections is very small. Some of these new apolitical brands include; Attico, Halpern, Rejina Pyo, Jacquemus and more.

Among all of these upstart, well-stablished, political and apolitical brands there are a few that are indeed into making political statements, yet it is something unexpected from the brand or there are some that have almost broken the golden rule of always staying neutral apolitical and have finally 'cut the cord.' Chanel being a classic, iconic name in the industry hadn't been involved with politics from the times of Coco Chanel. For a lot of critiques some of Chanel's surprises were exciting and represented the continuation of Coco Chanel's legacy, which involved fighting for women's rights and their empowerment. The Chanel Spring/Summer 2015 show in Paris turned heads and caused quite of an outrage of surprise, when absolutely the whole show screamed feminism. The theme, interior, the music, the collection and the 'played out' protest with feminist posters were something never done before for the brand at least in this format. When Karl Lagerfeld presented this collection along with the show, he definitely was not trying to follow a certain trend, considering the fact that making political statements in fashion was just becoming a consideration for the fashion world.

Burberry being a very well-known fashion house has never shown signs of being involved with any political issues or events. This was the case until Christopher Bailey changed the chronology of the brand during his final show as a creative director for Burberry. The brand has always presented collections with its signature style and color scheme. Burberry Fall 2018 Ready-To-Wear was a shock to the image of the brand in terms of the visuals, the design, the colors and the whole aesthetics. The whole theme of the show and the collection was rainbow. Christopher Bailey proved that it is never too late to show a brands' support and the awareness for a political issue by saying, "It's quite a poignant collection just because it's my last one, but it made me start thinking about the importance of time. I think we are living in such an interesting period, chaotic and upsetting and changing," he mused before the show. "I wanted to try and reflect that in some way in the collection."



Figure 34



Figure 35

Choosing to be political or apolitical for a high fashion brand doesn't always determine their future success in terms of recognition and sales. The phenomenal success of Gucci is one conundrum that comes to proof. The brand has mostly always been apolitical and has only made headlines regarding to politics and fashion very lately. Gucci delivering one of the most striking designs and runway shows didn't come up with a politicized collection, but rather joined the anti-gun movement and donated \$500,000 to the organization "March For Our Lives." "We stand with March For Our Lives and the fearless students across the country who demand that their lives and safety become a priority," said the company in a statement. "We have all been directly or indirectly impacted by these senseless tragedies, and Gucci is proud to join this movement with a donation of US\$500,000." states a Business of Fashion article by Chantal Fernandez. Gucci being part of the Kering group has helped increase the sales tremendously. The past decade for Gucci has been very hit and miss in terms of success, the past few years have been overwhelmingly everywhere. The name Gucci and its luxury is everywhere. Gucci's case is definite proof that there are a lot of ways a high fashion brand can increase sales or gain popularity and making political statements is not necessarily one.

Gucci is a well-established brand that has been on the market for a while and is one of the most known fashion houses in the world, so gaining even more popularity was perhaps easier for this brand, than for a newly established fashion house. There are exceptions in every case, however. Jacquemus, is a French high fashion label that was established in 2010 by a self-taught designer Simon Porte Jacquemus. In just a few years Jacquemus managed to gain immense popularity among celebrities, general public and other luxury buyers. Simon Porte himself has spoken about politics during one of his interviews, however the brand Jacquemus has been

politic-free from the start. This house has registered incredible success, considering the fact that it's a relatively new, upstart brand and that its popularity was gained by genuine designs and talent.

As it was previously mentioned one of the continuously fame-gaining, well-established high fashion houses that has gained a lot of attention due to its political positioning in the past few years is Dior. Ever since Maria Grazia Chiuri became the creative director of Dior, it transported into a very women-centered, feminist brand. Simply by seeing how popular Dior's "We Should All Be Feminists" t-shirts became, it was quite logical to assume that the brand has had success in the sales department as well. If one takes a simple look at Dior's 2014 annual financial report/statement and that of 2017, the theory is confirmed.

Tom Ford along with Burberry and Gucci is one of the most-famous well-established high fashion houses. The brand has always been famous for its signature, elegant, high-class collections. Tom Ford as a fashion house has never been involved with anything political, until in 2017 Tom Ford himself, who's the founder and the creative director of the brand made quite serious, in some cases even harsh comments when asked if he would dress the First Lady of the United States of America - Melania Trump. Even though, the designer confirmed that his comments were not personal, he later faces backlash from Donald Trump himself. It was reported that Tom Ford had strong opinions not only about dressing Melania Trump, but also Hillary Clinton. "I was asked to dress her quite a few years ago and I declined. She's not necessarily my image. Even had Hillary won she shouldn't be wearing my clothes, they're too expensive. I don't mean that in a bad way; they're not artificially expensive, it's how much it costs to make these things. I think the first lady has to relate to everybody," answered Tom Ford to the question if he would dress Mrs. Trump.

Whether these events had a later influence on Tom Ford's upcoming collections or not, one thing that came as a shock to the fashion world, was Tom Ford's Fall 2018 Ready-To-Wear collection. The whole theme, the aesthetics and the elegance that the brand is well-known for had shifted completely. The runway pieces were colorful, shiny, there were a lot of animal prints involved and strong political messaging that was imprinted on the bags, saying "Pussy Power." With this collection Tom Ford officially marked his presence at the political movement that grew in the industry and took such a rapid turn.



Figure 36



Figure 37

## Financial highlights

### Key consolidated data

<i>(EUR millions and as %)</i>	June 30, 2014 (12 months)	June 30, 2015 (12 months pro forma)	June 30, 2015 (2 months)	April 30, 2015 (12 months)
Revenue	30,984	30,120	4,768	29,881
Profit from recurring operations	6,050	6,087	881	6,090
Net profit	3,892	3,839	566	3,931
Net profit, Group share	1,425	1,388	216	1,431
Cash from operations before changes in working capital <sup>(a)</sup>	7,539	7,407	1,092	7,464
Operating investments arising from change in net cash position	1,959	1,994	333	1,937
Net cash from operating activities and operating investments (free cash flow)	2,426	2,301	40	2,473
Total equity <sup>(b)</sup>	30,337	28,106	28,106	27,867
Net financial debt <sup>(c)</sup>	7,927	6,277	6,277	6,237
Net financial debt/Total equity ratio	26%	22%	22%	22%

### Data per share

<i>(EUR)</i>	June 30, 2014 (12 months)	June 30, 2015 (12 months pro forma)	June 30, 2015 (2 months)	April 30, 2015 (12 months)
<b>Earnings per share</b>				
Basic Group share of net profit per share	7.97	7.75	1.21	8.00
Diluted Group share of net profit per share	7.90	7.67	1.20	7.90
<b>Dividend per share</b>				
Interim	1.90	-	-	1.10
Final	-	-	-	1.80
Gross amount paid for fiscal year <sup>(d) (e) (f)</sup>	3.10	-	-	2.90

Figure 38 Dior Annual Financial Statement 2014

## Financial highlights

### Key consolidated data

	Fiscal year 2017	Calendar year 2016	Fiscal year 2016
<i>(EUR millions and as %)</i>	12 months	12 calendar months, pro forma <sup>(a)</sup>	6 months (July 1 to Dec. 31, 2016)
Revenue	43,666	39,501	21,436
Gross margin	28,582	25,948	14,035
<i>Gross margin as a percentage of revenue</i>	65.5%	65.7%	65.5%
Profit from recurring operations	8,373	7,252	4,238
<i>Current operating margin as a percentage of revenue</i>	19.2%	18.4%	19.8%
Net profit	5,753	4,594	2,724
Net profit, Group share	2,240	1,764	1,058
Net profit, minority interests' share	3,513	2,830	1,666
Cash from operations before changes in working capital <sup>(b)</sup>	10,582	9,125	5,343
Operating investments	2,517	2,438	1,467
Net cash from operating activities and operating investments (free cash flow)	4,589	4,003	3,305
Equity, Group share	12,782	11,838	11,838
Minority interests	19,951	18,246	18,246
Total equity	32,733	30,084	30,084
Net financial debt <sup>(c)</sup>	2,001	4,753	4,753
Net financial debt <sup>(c)</sup> /Total equity ratio	6%	16%	16%

(a) Limited review procedures with no report issued.

(b) Before tax and interest paid.

(c) Excluding purchase commitments for minority interests, included in "Other non-current liabilities". See Note 20 to the consolidated financial statements.

Figure 39Dior Annual Financial Statement 2017

Maria Grazia Chiuri became the creative director of Dior in 2016. The two figures above clearly show that the revenue of the brand along with gross profits and margins has increased noticeably. Whether or not Chiuri's promotion of feminism on the runway is a marketing step or a result of genuine views and intentions, the brand has obviously succeeded in several aspects, due to its political fashion.

There is a lot of speculation among some fashion critiques and the general public, regarding the ongoing trend of fashion brands making political statements. While most of luxury consumers might be influenced by political fashion and allegedly buy most of it, there is a theory

that these high fashion brands simply might be following a certain marketing strategy. Indeed, the most popular theory among this subject is the trend aspect of it. With the overwhelming amount of brands making political statements, people are more keen to believe that it's yet another trend that is going around in the industry. The political situation seemed to pressure not only the fashion industry, but also the entertainment one, the IT industry, following the political actions of many world-known corporations and non-fashion brands. Furthermore, experts and researchers started exploring this new phenomenon of political activity and statements made almost in every possible industry, with brands ranging from Chanel to Apple, Facebook, Google and even Pepsi. So, the suspicions of a lot of industry experts about whether or not these companies are showing awareness as a result of marketing was quite natural. The past few years have definitely created a comfortable platform for brands and corporations to make political statements. It is important to know, however that even if these statements are marketing steps, they are targeting to a certain public, which according to the research can base around 91% of millennials, the generation that almost all brand are trying to target and focus on. A Forbes article called "When is It Okay for Brand To Get Political" by Ryan Erskine gives some definite answers to the questions raised. As the article claims, a 2015 study done by Cone Communications proves that 91% of millennials are more likely to become consumers of brands that are associated with a certain cause. So, even the whole politic mashup with other industries is a marketing/PR strategy, it is not in vain and it is directed to a certain group of people. This shows that Dior's success in its political collections was not 'out of the blue'.

Whether or not this wave of political issues raised by large corporate companies and brands is a chain of trends or a marketing plan/campaign, it is interesting to look at some opinions and insights from professionals working in fashion and in the field of PR and marketing.

Chloe Recine, who is the founder and the CEO of Hauturely, which a fashion website/community had very direct and laconic answers to the interview questions related to political fashion. Apparently Chloe Recine considers genuine the brands that are more feminism-focused, raising women's issues, such as Moschino. According to her, some of the reasons that brands might get political could be based on a certain political issue aligning and having similar values with a fashion brand. Recine think that it is ethical/right for a fashion brand to become political, saying "Politics is something that should never be overlooked, because it spreads to almost every aspect of a business." Chloe Recine gave a positive answer to the question "Do you like the clothing/runway pieces inspired by politics?", saying that even though she does like political runway pieces, often times she dismisses the ones that aren't 'in your face' political. To the question of whether or not these political garments will be popular in a matter of five years, she said, "No, not at all. It's only popular, talked about and promoted until the political agenda has gone one way or another then people often forget about the issue for many years then possibly it comes up down the road again." Finally, Recine, stated that she does feel certain pressure to feature more political fashion in Hauturely's content, but only because of it being "newsworthy and talked about."

Austin Rassmussen who is the manager of Hauturely, gave thorough insight and answers into some of the questions related to the subject of this project. Rassmussen, being someone who has worked in fashion for a while, had a lot of opinions about what high fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims. "Over the past couple of years, I have seen extensive political statements rising in fashion brands in their runway shows, in their campaigns, and on their social media. As someone who is heavily involved online with the world of fashion, it is something that is happening more and more especially with politicians like Donald Trump and movements such

as the 'Time's Up' display in the 2018 Golden Globes Awards show. When I think of brands that are getting more genuinely political, I think of several brands, such as Dior, Tommy Hilfiger, Talbot Runhof, and many more every time fashion week comes up. Marc Jacobs specifically, while not directly speaking of runway fashion, has come out with his new 'Shameless' foundation in his makeup line, which heavily features a wide range of shades, including many for people of colour. His extensive social media posts present that it is imperative to show diversity, and not just make it an act of tokenism. Christian Dior has had a few political slogans, such as in their Spring Summer 2017 show, which showcased a shirt embossed with text that read 'WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS.' Being one of the top fashion houses in the world, I felt like this was huge for the politics in fashion that Maria Grazia Chiuri, the Creative Director of Dior had exhibited. Talbot Runhof's Fall Winter 2017 show displayed four bold and colourful knits that read 'Sad!' 'Persist' and 'Lie to Me.' 'Sad!', being an instantly recognizable tweet from Donald Trump. Co-founder Johnny Talbo said "With all of the lies, the fake news, and alternative facts, we wanted to do a collection about truth," to Vogue backstage of his show. "If you have a platform to say something and you don't, then shame on you." This is a massive statement, and it is incredible to see it starting at runway shows, so it can start at the top, and work its way down by bringing its message to everyone. For the most part, their efforts to be political are genuine to make it short, in my opinion. But they are also brands that need to make money, which is something we always need to remember, and they do have pressure from the public and media to make trends, and advocate politics where it is necessary. Political fashion has had a lot of momentum, and fashion brands, celebrities, and everyday people are starting to do this because it is critical for people to be aware, and because it is time for change," says tells Austin Rassmussen. According to him, it is absolutely ethical and right for a fashion brand to

make political statements. The reason it is so right to become involved with politics according to Rassmussen, is the following, “It is right because it is needed in this time where we have such crazy political uproar and new movements popping up so often. Due to the nature of high fashion - designers are the one that sets the stage, the ones who start trends in fashion. With millions of cult-like followers, these fashion houses have the perfect place to display and address what is going on in the world. Fashion is political in every sense, in new trends, in how men and women dress, how they can dress, and what identity is, and what fashion is to one’s identity. It is most certainly ethical to be able to broadcast political and new ideas in an unconventional way, delivering to unsuspecting people in the audience. This is a new wave of how critical issues can be brought up and be delivered to the general public, and it’s exciting to think of the future of what fashion can do politically, and what change it can bring.” Austin Rassmussen didn’t give an exact answer to the question, “Do you like the clothing/runway pieces inspired by politics?” He thinks that even though runway pieces with political messaging are powerful and sensational, they shouldn’t be seen outside the runway, saying, “I think they should stay on the runway, and not be taken into everyday wear. I think that articles of clothing with any types of statements written on them are actually quite gaudy and tasteless. I think the clothes should rather be a conversation starter from the runway and more of an online topic rather than to be worn. The crucial reason for these pieces are simply to make a statement, and honestly I don’t think that they are meant to actually become pieces in one’s wardrobe, but that is just my thoughts.” Chloe Recine and Rassmussen both have the same opinion on the long lasting power of political fashion. Austin Rassmussen thinks that these pieces are simply a reflection of the time we live in and just like most fashion/trends it’ll be forgotten in a matter of few years. What concerns the pressure of featuring politically correct brands/collections in Hauteurely as a manager, he said the

following, “Being extremely active in the online fashion community, I constantly see and hear what is happening. When political statements happen in the fashion world, I definitely think it is significantly salient, and natural, to feature it. It is becoming more prominent every fashion week to see something new that makes a statement. As I coordinate and organize both [hauturely.com](http://hauturely.com)’s and [totalmenswear.com](http://totalmenswear.com)’s social media accounts, I definitely feel the need to raise awareness and share when something big and impactful happens in fashion. In the fashion world, we all know how fast things happen, and how hectic lives are of those that work around it, so definitely it can feel pressured to keep up to date with it all. Do I feel pressured as if it were to be an obligation to share political fashion? Definitely not. Fashion is such a remarkable art form, and to be able to make statements in such a broad industry is so phenomenal and necessary, and I definitely hope to see more of it in upcoming fashion weeks.”

When it comes to interviewing professionals or individuals working in this field, it is important to be as diverse as it is possible and get the opinions of people working in different positions. Melina Morry, who is a Toronto-based fashion blogger and a freelancer also agreed to discuss politics and fashion as well as give her authentic thoughts on it. On genuine designers making political statements, Morry said the following, “A few designers that I think are being genuine with their political stance are Zac Posen, Marc Jacobs and Tom Ford. They were brave when they decided not to dress the First Lady. That must have taken a lot of guts to publically declare their opinions like that and risked losing clientele.” “Fashion is a powerful way to communicate your opinions and views without having to say anything. Take the Time’s Up movement that’s been visualized during awards season, for example. Even though some celebs may have not spoken out directly about their views, by wearing black they spoke volumes without actually having to speak, ” answers Morry when asked a question about the reasons brands get political.

The fashion writer thinks that it is impossible to please everyone when it comes to political messaging in fashion, so the ethical aspect of it depends on the brand and their intentions. It seems as if Melina Morry is not very into the garments designed and produced as a result of political fashion. What she said, concerning this is the following, “It depends on *how* political they are. I’m not someone who usually airs my political views publically. However, if it’s subtly inspired by politics, then for sure! But I’m definitely not into any politically charged graphic tees.” She also agreed upon the assumption that politics-inspired pieces will not be popular in a few years. Finally, Morry confirmed that she does feel certain pressure as a blogger and a fashion writer to feature political themes in her articles. “I try to keep my blog politics-free but when writing articles for other publications I can get a little more political. I just interviewed a Canadian actress who had some very strong political views and it actually opened my eyes to different ways of seeing things and recent events! I’m really excited to write up the article and explore my political side a little bit more,” said Melina Morry.

A PR professional Tatevik Avetisyan shared her expertise and personal opinions on brands making political statements and the effects it has on its reputation. To the question “ As a PR professional, do you think it is ethical for a high fashion brand to make political statements in any form?” she gave the following answer, “As a business, any brand should try to be neutral, as it caters to the needs of diverse publics, focuses on assuring its bottom-line profits and should also be concerned about public/social good. From the PR ethics perspective - political neutrality is essential. However, brands may choose to stand up for universal values or principles of their own (associations that connect our minds to certain mental picture or even behavior of a brand). These associations can be connected with values such as freedom, democracy, freedom of expression or speech, right to choice and much more. In this case the associations (or public

perception) connect with the "story" or the message of the brand, which can be politicized by itself. Think of the messages of sport or outlet brands like Nike (Just do it - this has a very strong background story based on a political phenomenon of capital punishment - check); Adidas (impossible is nothing - can very well allude to freedom); Gap (For every generation there's a *Gap* - a pun on a much discussed *generation gap*). These are just examples that cast light on the phenomenon that fashion - or human desire to dress up - can very well be a political statement inherently. It is quite different, though, from a case if Armani or Versace as businesses or their CEOs stand up and make a statement supporting a presidential candidate or a law draft. This is a different game, in which case this act goes beyond the classic public relations into the realm of political communications, lobbying and politics." It is also important to learn about the role that the PR department has in making the decision to make political statements. "In terms of ethics, PR department would not advise to get into politics - this would be my professional stand. Not that politics is necessarily a "dirty" thing. A business could support a cause or a reform that brings public benefit but should not get into "political behind- the-scene" games for its own benefit. A company's integrity is key to its public acceptance and its reputation's longevity and health. This is what a PR professional tracks and maintains in a company along with many other functions. The influence of a PR professional very much depends on the factor whether a company's leadership treats it as a strategic or tactical (support) function. You may check any PR book - chapter on PR ethics and the concept of a "whistle-blower", "says Tatevik Avetisyan. According to her keeping a neutral position for a brand does not necessarily equal to being careless. The tradition of making political statements not only in the fashion industry, but also in other spheres according to Avetisyan is a matter of what turn the social, political and economic situation will take.

It is, indeed impossible to predict the intentions of brands when it comes to political messaging, but when it comes to the garments inspired by fashion, the answers of the three industry experts show that they most probably won't have the same popularity as they do now.

When it comes to a creative industry like fashion is, it is extremely difficult to make specific conclusions, especially based on the opinions and expertise of a few industry professionals. Surveys are a great way of getting a broader look at the subject by interviewing a greater number of individuals. The survey targeted and was filled in by individuals representing the millennial generation who are knowledgeable of the field and are highly interested in high-fashion. As it was predicted the opinions on the mixture of fashion and politics turned to be very diverse and insightful.

#### What do you think are some of the reasons fashion brands/houses became so involved with politics?



88 responses

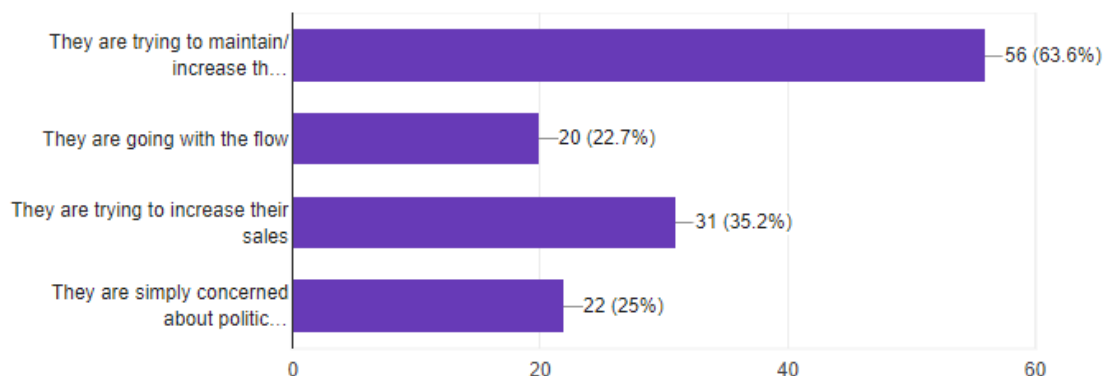


Figure 40

Judging from figure one, from the 88 individuals that took the survey, the vast majority is keen on thinking that the political statements made by high fashion brands are results of 1. A

brand's concern about maintaining or gaining a reputation, 2. Simply going with the flow, joining the movement, 3. Increasing the sales. As it is clear, only a small percentage of the participants think that these brands are genuinely concerned about the political issues they are 'talking' about.

Do you think it is right or ethical for a fashion brand to make serious political statements?

88 responses

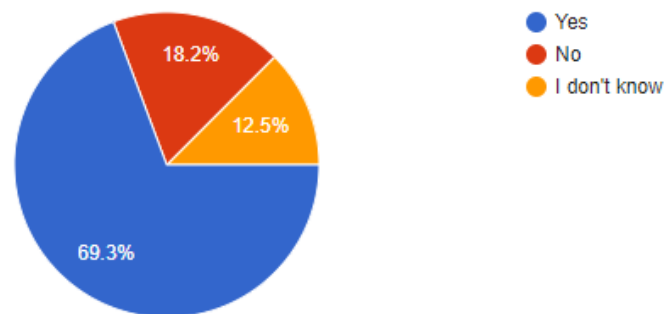


Figure 41

The chart presented above proves that not only the industry professionals that have been interviewed, but also the vast majority of fashion enthusiasts think that it is absolutely right or ethical for a fashion brand to make serious political statements.

Do you like the clothing/runway pieces inspired by politics/political issues/ideologies?

88 responses

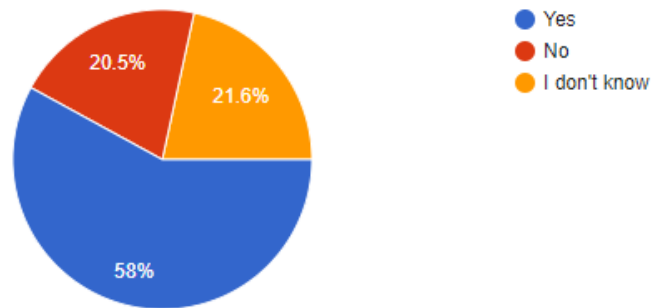


Figure 42

Based on this chart, it can be concluded that a little more than half of the youth that participated in this survey like the runway pieces inspired by politics/political issues/ideologies.

If you were given certain amount of money to buy designer clothes/accessories, would you buy pieces that have political messages on them?

88 responses

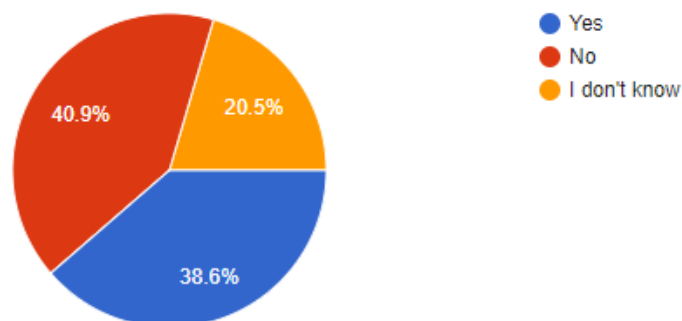


Figure 43

Liking certain runway pieces that are politicized doesn't necessarily mean willing to purchase and wear them. This one figure above is the ultimate proof of that. Even though the percentage of individuals that liked the pieces exceeded the ones who didn't or simply didn't know in the previous chart, in this one it is clear that the 40.9% in this chart, which is the largest is wouldn't purchase politics-inspired designer items, when given a certain amount of money.

In your opinion, will these politically inspired pieces (e.g. the infamous Dior feminism related t-shirts) be popular in a matter of five years as they are now?

88 responses

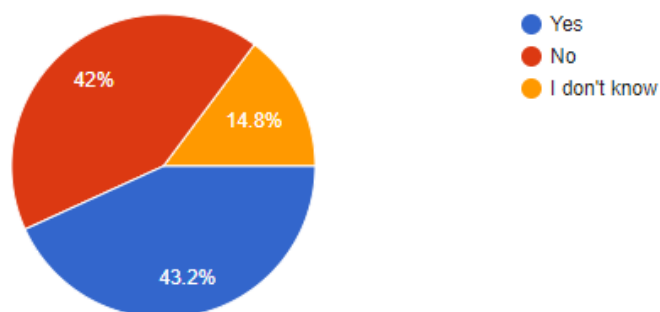


Figure 44

With a slight difference in percentage, more people think that politics-inspired runway pieces will actually continue to be popular in a matter of five years. This is where the opinions of professionals and fashion enthusiasts clash a little bit.

Only 33 individuals gave an answer to the open-ended question “In your opinion, what fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims? If possible, explain why?” Opinions varied rapidly. There were answers stating that none of the high fashion brands making political statements are genuine. A lot of individuals considered Dior to be very genuine in its feminist collections. Some answers concluded that all brands making political statements are genuine in their claims and intentions. The names Stella McCartney and Vivienne Westwood were

mentioned once only as genuine brands. Below are figures displaying the responses to this open-ended question.

## In your opinion, what fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims? If possible, explain why?

33 responses

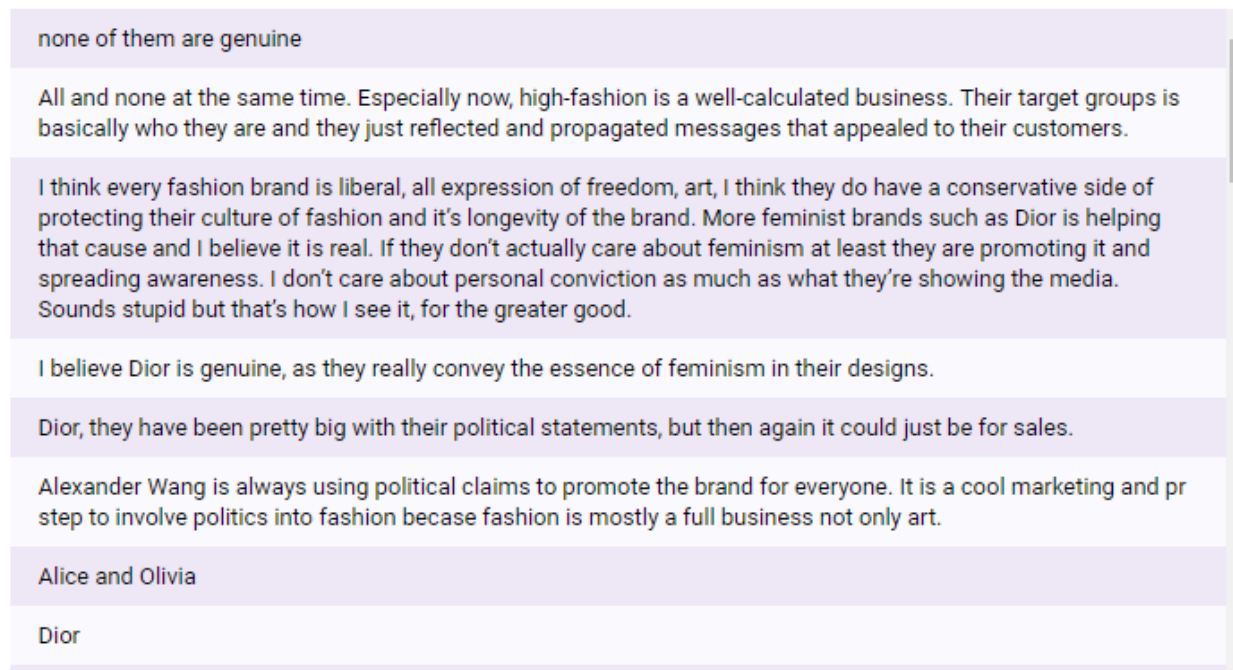


Figure 45

## In your opinion, what fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims? If possible, explain why?

33 responses

I believe most of the brands that go political tend to be genuine, if they didn't believe in it they wouldn't do it. But I actually think that the most truthful is Demna Gvasalia, both with Balenciaga and VETEMENTS, who created some pieces that were subtly sending a political message as if to say "This is fashion, not politics but if I can use my creativeness to point out what bothers people and to represent their feelings then so be it".

public school, gypsy sport, Raf Simons (music choice - this is not america)

They're all ingenuine. What good does a thousand dollar tshirt that says "we should all be feminists" do for feminism? Feminism should not be exploited for profit.

The fashion brand(s) that I consider genuine in their political claims is Dior. From the clothes, to the walls- literally, they had their political claim stated. The support of feminism isn't just some cool 'trend' that is being followed for looks- its a belief. They like many others know that womens rights are important, therefore I believe it's genuine.

Personally I don't think any of them are, because at this stage you could perceive them as just jumping on the bandwagon and following current trends. Whilst I do think that fashion brands should engage with politics when it has a direct influence, to some extent designers are doing it purely to be 'trendy' and on a far more superficial level.

Definitely not Forever 21. I personally don't know a lot of genuine fashion brands that do this. I see A LOT of political messages from brands like Zara and H&M who use it because it's trendy and put a nice background behind it. It's a marketing ploy that's being exploited

Figure 46

## In your opinion, what fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims? If possible, explain why?

33 responses

I think brands who don't just say they support a certain political stance, but also act like it e.g. when you say you support feminism, you can't put out an ad that's demeaning towards women

Miu Miu with its Women's Tales. Because the brand give a huge opportunity for female directors to have a voice in the cinema industry and create something new.

N/A

Not all of them. For example LVMH endorses and be supports MGC "feminist" message for Dior but at the same time still have Karl as the creative director of Chanel despite his many statements supporting assaulters and defending the right for designers to do whatever they want to models.

None, I believe since these days political statements made that are inline with the beliefs of popular culture enable brands to build a cult following which means more money. When the popular culture changes its tone so will these brands. I believe brands should keep shut and out of politics, since they are unnecessarily contributing to the political divide of people and worsening it. People should have the right to chose their beliefs whether right or wrong and the peer pressuring done by major fashion houses is unethical. Fashion is art and should stay as such, any contributions fashion houses wish to make to society can be done in other ways. Should they really wish to be politically active they should keep it separated from their business and PR (like having separate social media accounts for showcasing their efforts). People indulge in fashion for fun and having political views thrust upon you from a place you deem to be enjoyable is frustrating, more so for people removed from the western world who do not care for your politics (such as me)

Figure 47

## In your opinion, what fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims? If possible, explain why?

33 responses

It's really hard to think of a brand. They are way too busy trying to fit with the "popular" opinions that I don't even know what statement is real

Stella Mccartney

Urban brands like Eckhaus Latta, because they aren't trying to suck their own dick and blast that they're being diverse. they incorporate women of all races, religions, and sizes without broadcasting that they're doing so just to increase sales.

Dior, Versace, Gucci

I feel like it's difficult to figure this out since I don't know the designers personal political beliefs. They could be being genuine or they could just be making what they think people/customers want

I can't think of a brand I know not to be genuine in that way

Vivienne Westwood. The brand has always pushed political narratives whereas other brands do it to follow the trend.

jpg

A high fashion Brand or house can't make every political statement, they Can contribute to some political and social issue (ecology for ex) but by appropriating some message like anarchy or communism because these political ideas in time were actually trving to fight the capitalism side of the societv and svstem. So the fact that

Figure 48

In your opinion, what fashion brands are being genuine in their political claims? If possible, explain why?

33 responses

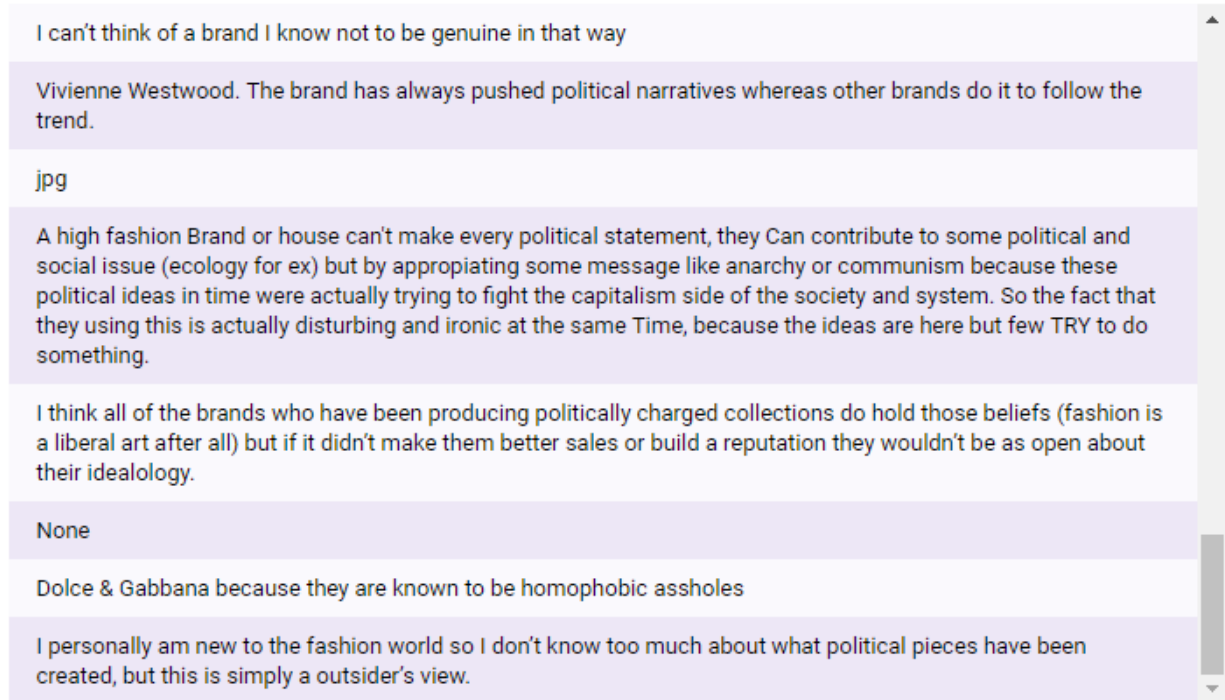


Figure 49

## Conclusion

What this project tried to prove was that absolutely any dispute, especially related to politics has double standards. The diverse range of fashion houses that chose to make political statements over the years is an indicator that there are absolutely no limits for showing support for a political/social movement or an issue. Furthermore, the decision of doing so shouldn't lay upon expectations of increasing sales or gaining a reputation. This is proven by the examples of the brands that by being apolitical and/or newly established manage to reach significant amount of

success in the industry. The predictions of the professionals working in the field of political fashion losing popularity in a matter of five years is still a topic for dispute. It is fair to conclude that the brands that have been making political statements before it became a trend are undoubtedly genuine. The ones that seemed to follow the movement are hard to determine whether they are genuine or not. Either, this project also proves that political statements made in the fashion industry are usually ethical and there is no question of right or wrong for the most part.

### **Limitations and Avenues for Future**

This capstone project is no exception when it comes to certain limitations. Perhaps, one of the biggest limitation that was faced during the initial research period of this project was the lack of coherent and academic sources. Even though, the project is an academic one and is based solely and mostly on research, it was quite challenging to find credible and academic sources discussing the relationship and the possible involvements of fashion and politics as two very different worlds with each other.

During the initial research state, it was also difficult to find fairly relevant articles discussing the political statements made by current high fashion houses. Later, however, as the topic became more and more, the word 'politics' was trending in fashion magazine headlines.

It was well-known to me, that in order to become someone in the fashion industry one has to knock countless doors. However, when I was trying to interview few fashion bloggers/influencers and get their opinion on the subject and most importantly on the garments inspired by politics, I didn't face rejection, but rather complete despise. I tried to contact

countless bloggers on different platforms, but got only one of them to respond to my request and conduct the interview.

As much as all of these limitations were discouraging, but they also helped me shape this project the way that it is now. This project can definitely be a source of collective information or even inspiration that thoroughly and from an academic standpoint touches upon this important and relevant subject.

## Bibliography

Banner, L. W. (2003). *Fashion and Politics*. *The Women's Review of Books*, 21(2). Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4024291>

Calvin Klein show delivers political message at Fashion Week. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2017/02/11/calvin-klein-show-delivers-political-message-at-fashion-week.html>

Cartner-Morley, J. (2018, April 18). Stella McCartney: 'Only 1% of clothing is recycled. What are we doing?' Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2018/apr/18/stella-mccartney-designer-ethical-fashion-interview>

Cartner-Morley, J. (2017, February 23). Milan fashion week: Miuccia Prada returns to feminist form. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/feb/23/milan-fashion-week-miuccia-prada-returns-to-feminist-form>

Cartner-Morley, J. (2014, September 30). Karl Lagerfeld's new look for Chanel: Feminist protest and slogans. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2014/sep/30/karl-lagerfeld-chanel-show-paris-fashion-week>

Chabbott, S. (2017, February 13). Donald Trump Blasts Tom Ford for Quotes About Melania. Retrieved from <http://wwd.com/eye/people/donald-trump-speaks-out-against-tom-ford-for-quotes-about-melania-10757468/>

Dazed. (2015, April 08). Vivienne Westwood's top ten political moments. Retrieved from <http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/24335/1/vivienne-westwood-s-top-ten-political-moments>

Erskine, R. (2017, October 22). When Is It Okay For Brands To Get Political? Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanerskine/2017/10/22/is-it-okay-for-brands-to-get-political-and-when/#7b33da744208>

Fernandez, C. (2018, February 25). Why Gucci Decided to Support Gun Control. Retrieved from <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/news-bites/why-gucci-decided-to-support-gun-control>

Friedman, V. (n.d.). *When Politics Became a Fashion Statment. The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/fashion/the-year-in-style-politics-dressing.html>

Gapper, J. (2018, February 28). Gucci success shows the value of multibrands. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/6364da42-1bb1-11e8-aaca-4574d7dabfb6>

Givhan, R. (2017, September 27). Review | Dior slaps a slogan on a T-shirt and tries to pass it off as feminism. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/09/27/dior-slaps-a-slogan-on-a-t-shirt-and-tries-to-pass-it-off-as-feminism/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.c11ac4b52068](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/09/27/dior-slaps-a-slogan-on-a-t-shirt-and-tries-to-pass-it-off-as-feminism/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c11ac4b52068)

Gorlinski, V. (2018, April 17). Jean Paul Gaultier. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Paul-Gaultier>

Hardy, A. (2017, February 15). Donald Trump Probably Won't Be Happy With These NYFW Shows. Retrieved from <https://www.teenvogue.com/gallery/nyfw-political-donald-trump-chromat-tommy-hilfiger>

Horyn, C. (2017, September 28). *Fashion's Millennial Problem*. Retrieved November 02, 2017, from <https://www.thecut.com/2017/09/dior-dries-van-noten-lanvin-margiela-spring-2018-reviews.html>

Hua, K. (2017, February 21). Designers Who Made Political Statements At New York Fashion Week 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karenhua/2017/02/17/designers-who-made-political-statements-at-new-york-fashion-week-2017/#6aae9d1028b5>

Hunt, K. (2018, March 21). How Simon Porte Jacquemus Became Fashion's Breakout Hit Of SS17. Retrieved from <https://www.elle.com/uk/fashion/longform/a32882/simon-porte-jacquemus/>

Images, A. T. (n.d.). All the Political Statements the Fashion Crowd Is Making During NYFW. Retrieved from <https://www.thecut.com/2017/02/all-the-political-statements-brands-are-making-during-nyfw.html>

Matthews, N. (2018, March 19). Is This the Craziest Accessory From Men's Fashion Week? Retrieved from <https://www.elle.com/fashion/news/a24191/racism-headress-walter-van-beirendonck/>

Matera, A. (2018, February 28). Maria Grazia Chiuri Gets Political Through New Dior Collection. Retrieved from <https://fashionunfiltered.com/style/2018/dior-fall-2018-ready-to-wear-show-set-design/>

- McRobbie, A. (1997). *Bridging the Gap: Feminism, Fashion and Consumption*. *Feminist Review*, 55(1), 73-89. doi:10.1057/fr.1997.4
- Mei, G. (2018, March 16). Tommy Hilfiger Doesn't Think Designers Should Get "Political" About Dressing Melania Trump. Retrieved from <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/style-beauty/fashion/a8360599/tommy-hilfiger-melania-trump-proud-not-political/>
- Miller, J. I. (2005). *Fashion and Democratic Relationships*. *Polity*, 37(1), 3-23. doi:10.1057/palgrave.polity.2300002
- One of the Biggest Trends in Fashion Right Now? Taking Sides*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 02, 2017, from <http://www.thefashionlaw.com/home/the-biggest-trend-in-fashion-right-now-taking-sides>
- Regulated information. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.dior-finance.com/en-US/Documentation/InformationsReglementees/01,02\\_RapportsFinanciers.aspx/](http://www.dior-finance.com/en-US/Documentation/InformationsReglementees/01,02_RapportsFinanciers.aspx/)
- Richford, R. (2018, March 05). At Paris Fashion Week, Stella McCartney is 'Woke,' Giambattista Valli Responds to the Right. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/paris-fashion-week-2018-stella-mccartney-giambattista-valli-get-political-1092105>
- Road Safety Annual Report 2014. (2014). *Road Safety Annual Report*. doi:10.1787/irtad-2014-en
- Rodulfo, K. (2017, October 09). Dior's "We Should All Be Feminist" Shirts Will Benefit Rihanna's Charity. Retrieved from <https://www.elle.com/fashion/news/a43431/dior-we-should-all-be-feminists-shirt-rihanna-charity/>
- S. (2018, February 18). Burberry February 2018 Show. Retrieved from <http://wwd.com/runway/fall-2018/london/burberry/review/>

Saul, H. (2016, December 06). Melania Trump: Jean Paul Gaultier says he would be happy to dress future First Lady. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/melania-trump-jean-paul-gaultier-british-fashion-awards-donald-trump-a7458661.html>

The Evolution of Fashion in Politics. (2017, December 18). Retrieved from <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/the-evolution-of-fashion-in-politics>

Vivienne Westwood. (n.d.). *Fashion Photography Archive*. doi:10.5040/9781474260428-fpa262

Vivienne Westwood on Climate Change, Politics and Punk. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.lofficielusa.com/fashion/vivienne-westwood-interview#image-11158>

Waters, J. (2015, April 17). Fashion's most iconic political statements. Retrieved from <http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/24414/1/fashion-s-most-iconic-political-statements>

Weiner, K. (n.d.). *Dressed to Express: Fashion's Role as a Political Medium*. Retrieved November 02, 2017, from <http://harvardpolitics.com/culture/dressedtoexpress/>