

PEMBANGUNAN DAN CABARAN *HAUTE COUTURE* DALAM INDUSTRI FESYEN

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Abstrak

Haute Couture merupakan sebuah industri fesyen yang berpengaruh besar dalam mewujudkan jenama mewah seperti *Christian Dior*, *Valentino*, *Channel* dan *Fendi*. Perkembangannya mengambil masa yang lama iaitu bermula sejak abad ke-19 semasa pemerintahan Raja Louis XIV di Perancis sehinggalah menjadi sebuah falsafah yang berkuasa dalam legasi fesyen dunia. Penyelidikan ini adalah bersifat kualitatif dalam mengkaji evolusi industri *Haute Couture* dan impaknya kepada industri fesyen pada hari ini. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan menganalisis pasca-penulisan yang berkaitan dengan konsep, legasi sejarah, perkembangan dan sumbangan industri *Haute Couture* terhadap industri fesyen pada masa kini. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa, penerimaan terhadap industri *Haute Couture* mengalami krisis dalam mengekalkan identiti asli yang diwarisi sejak dari abad ke-19 lagi, namun legasinya dalam sejarah fesyen masih kekal berkuasa dan mempunyai peminat yang tersendiri dalam kalangan golongan elit dari seluruh negara yang mementingkan hasil kerja tangan yang asli, eksklusif dan bercita rasa tinggi. Rekomendasi untuk kajian akan datang adalah sebagai kajian rintis bagi penyelidikan kualitatif dan perbandingan budaya dalam industri *Haute Couture*.

Kata Kunci: Fesyen, Haute Couture, Industri Fesyen, Perkembangan Fesyen, Sejarah Fesyen

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DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES OF HAUTE COUTURE IN FASHION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Haute Couture, with a history dating back to the 19th century during the reign of King Louis XIV in France, has played a significant role in shaping luxury brands like Christian Dior, Valentino, Chanel, and Fendi. This research adopts a qualitative, historical approach to examine the evolution of the Haute Couture industry and its enduring impact on the contemporary fashion landscape. The research was conducted by analyzing post-writings related to the concept, historical lineage, development, and contributions of Haute Couture to the current fashion industry. The findings reveal that while the Haute Couture industry faced challenges in preserving its original identity from the 19th century, its historical legacy continues to exert a profound influence and maintains a dedicated following among elites worldwide who value originality, exclusivity, and intricate craftsmanship. Future studies could consider this research as a pilot study for qualitative and comparative cultural investigations within the Haute Couture industry.

Keywords: *Development of fashion, Fashion, Fashion industry, Haute couture, History of fashion*

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1.0 Introduction

“Fashion is the mirror of history -King Louis XIV 1638-1715)”

As per Helena et al. (2015), the evolution of fashion encompasses alterations in style, color, and trends, influenced by various factors such as societal, economic, technological, and cultural dynamics. Within the fashion industry, trends often undergo cycles, where previous trends resurface with fresh adaptations. Clothing, one of the fundamental human necessities, alongside food and shelter, plays a pivotal role, as emphasized by Muhammad Razis Ismail (2023). This significance arises from clothing not merely serving as a means of covering the body but also as a reflection of one's lifestyle and identity, encompassing individual, ethnic, and national attributes, as asserted by Handakara (2022).

The term "Haute Couture" originated from the English fashion designer Charles Frederick Worth in the 19th century, who coined it to denote "luxury-level fashion." According to a feature in Fortune Indonesia (2022) titled "What is Haute Couture? History, Purpose, and Classification," Haute Couture pertains to the creation of customized clothing tailored to the specific preferences of the buyer. Additionally, Haute Couture is characterized by the use of premium materials and exceptional craftsmanship in fashion design.

In essence, Haute Couture, a term originating from French, translates to "high sewing" or "high-class tailoring," with "haute" meaning "high" and "couture" referring to "tailor." However, recent times have witnessed intense global competition in the fashion landscape, with several major cities like New York, London, Milan, and Tokyo emerging as prominent fashion hubs. China, notably Shanghai, has also played a significant role in advancing the Asian fashion scene and impacting the global clothing industry imports. Often referred to as "The Paris of The East," Shanghai is poised to become a pivotal player in the global fashion industry in the coming years (Steele, 2017). The French Ministry of Industry has granted exclusive permission to only 14 fashion houses to use the coveted term "Haute Couture." These prestigious fashion houses include renowned brands such as Adeline Andre, Alexandre Vauthier, Alexis Mabille, Chanel, Christian Dior, Franck Sorbier, Giambattista Valli, Givenchy, Jean Paul Gaultier, Julien Fournie, Maison Margiela, Schiaparelli, Stephanie Rolland, and Yiqing Yin. Additionally, outside France, notable names like Armani Prive, Atelier Versace, Elie Saab, Valentino, and Gucci have gained recognition in the Haute Couture sphere. Moreover, celebrated fashion designers like Georges Hobeika, Ralph and Russo, and Zuhair Murad are frequently invited as guest members to participate in the Haute Couture shows each year.

Drawing inspiration from a memorable monologue delivered by Miranda Priestly (portrayed by Meryl Streep) in the movie "The Devil Wears Prada," it becomes evident that cerulean blue serves as a metaphor for the colossal impact of Haute Couture in the luxury fashion industry. As Priestly explains, "That blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs," highlighting how this color symbolizes the vast financial value and livelihoods dependent on the Haute Couture industry. Thus, this paper aims to delve into the historical development and discourse surrounding Haute Couture within the fashion industry.



2.0 Problem Statement

The concept of 'glamour' has also evolved in the modern world, largely independent of Haute Couture, as reported by Luxuo Magazine in 2022. While glamour once epitomized handcrafted gowns adorned with pearls, contemporary luxury is often quantified in terms of watches, shoes, and compact, chic handbags. Consequently, the question arises, can Haute Couture adapt to the evolving landscape of modern technology and fashion? With its declining popularity and demand, fashion observers speculate that the Haute Couture industry teeters on the brink of extinction. The Haute Couture fashion industry faces a critical sustainability challenge due to its traditionally exclusive and resource-intensive production processes. With growing consumer awareness of environmental concerns, there is an urgent need to explore innovative, eco-friendly practices that can align Haute Couture with sustainability goals while maintaining its exclusivity and craftsmanship.

3.0 Research Objectives

- I. Delving into the evolving landscape of haute couture history
- II. Examining the sustainable challenge on couture culture.
- III. Gaining insight into the innovative contemporary approach and influence of haute couture in the fashion industry.

4.0 Significant of Research

This study sets the stage for future comprehensive research in the Haute Couture industry. It will not only contribute to fashion studies but also offer valuable insights into the broader cultural dynamics of globalization. Understanding the intricate relationship between culture, craftsmanship, and creativity in haute couture is essential for preserving its heritage and ensuring its continued relevance in a rapidly changing world.

5.0 How Paris Became a Fashion City?

The evolution of this style of fashion can be traced back to the early 10th century when significant urban centers began to emerge in Asia, notably Tokyo (formerly Edo) in Japan and the city of Suzhou during the Ming Dynasty in China. These cities played pivotal roles in the historical development of the fashion industry. However, it wasn't until the 17th century, when King Louis XIV solidified his throne and authority, that French fashion ascended to become the global fashion leader. In Figure 1, we witness a fashion style inspired by King Louis XIV, renowned for his distinctive and extravagant wardrobe (Steele, 2022¹).

¹ Dr. Lecture Series Valerie Steele, *Fashion Culture | Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPeFvGME9_0. He is a fashion historian and director of the Museum of Fashion in Technology (FIT).





Figure 1: King Louis XIV (Sources: Fashion History Timeline, 2018.
<https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1701-hyacinthe-rigaud-louis-xiv/>)

As Kurkdjian (2020) points out, prior to the advent of textile printing methods in France, the country pioneered its own approach to fashion design, particularly in the creation of floral dresses. This method involved the use of dolls from rue Saint-Honore, as depicted in Figure 2. These unique styles were crafted once a month by a small boutique located on Rue Saint-Honore in France and were subsequently distributed to markets across Europe, England, the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, and America.

The introduction of this innovative French fashion style was not without controversy, given that the majority of European societies at the time adhered to Catholic Christianity and held conservative views, particularly regarding women's attire. France aimed to introduce a style that was informal, lightweight, and characterized by Neo-Classical elements, pushing the boundaries of traditional fashion norms.



Figure 2: *Saint-Honore Street doll* (Sources: Fashion history timeline, 2021.
<https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1480-1489/>)



Figure 3: Marie Antoinette wearing clothing known as *Chemise Dress*
 (Sources: Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun (French, 1755 - 1842). Marie-Antoinette, After 1783. Oil on canvas; 92.7 x 73.1 cm. Washington D.C: National Gallery of Art, 1960.6.41. Source: National Gallery of Art)

In Figure 3, we see a portrait from 1783 featuring Marie Antoinette donning attire referred to as a "chemise dress," as rendered by the artist Elizabeth Vigee Le Brun. This particular portrayal stirred significant controversy upon its public unveiling, with critics asserting that the Queen appeared almost naked due to her attire. Consequently, this portrait was removed and replaced with images of the Queen in more conservative European-style formal wear.

However, with the advent of the 1789 Revolution, a transformation occurred in French fashion, particularly within the avant-garde realm. On the left, Figure 4 displays a Jacobin and a woman both dressed in the Neo-Classical style reminiscent of Queen Marie Antoinette. Meanwhile, the image on the right holds great historical significance, portraying "Liberty Leading the People," painted in 1830. This artwork offers a glimpse into the historical landscape of both the 1789 and 1830 revolutions (Steel, 1988).



Figure 4: *Liberty Leading the People* 1789 and 1830
 (Sources: "Liberty Leading the People" by Eugène Delacroix – A Detailed Analysis, 2023. <https://artincontext.org/liberty-leading-the-people-by-eugene-delacroix/>)

Following the events of the 1830 Revolution, French society began to openly embrace and admire the intrinsic beauty of fashion. This transformation is vividly depicted in Figure 5, an illustration created by Giovanni from "The Fashion," with French writer Balzac contributing the idea that "Clothes are always a very important component in telling you who they are." Balzac contends that one's attire serves as a symbol of their aspirations and identity, reflecting what they aim to become in the future.



This perspective resonated with numerous individuals, leading them to believe that dressing impeccably and in accordance with societal norms could elevate their social standing within the French hierarchy. Consequently, this phenomenon evolved into a cultural phenomenon, as people in France engaged in a spirited pursuit of elegance and opulence (Palmer, 2001).



Figure 5: Illustration Produced by Giovanni From *The fashion*
(Sources: Fashion history timeline, 2019)

In the 19th century, there was a notable emphasis on equality, or perhaps even a greater degree of it, among Parisian figures who were at the forefront of pioneering new fashion styles. This group played a pivotal role in disseminating the new fashion ideology in a more contemporary French manner. The Parisians were not merely concerned with dressing in a manner that reflected femininity; they also carried with them a set of ideas and philosophies. As early as 1860, there was a book that underscored the significance of fashion in Paris, stating that "half of the population in Paris lives off fashion, and the other half lives for fashion." Understanding this, it becomes evident how deeply individuals who held fashion in high regard influenced artists and the general populace (Veillon, 1990; Steel, 2022).

The emergence of Haute Couture marked a pivotal moment in the history of French fashion. During the latter half of the 19th century, Paris evolved into a thriving center of fashion and industry. Haute Couture, championed by figures like Charles Frederick, transformed fashion from a small-scale endeavor into a profitable business and a form of highly refined artistry (Picken, 1956; Troy, 2003).

Paris became the destination of choice for aristocrats from around the world due to the presence of numerous department stores and renowned boutiques showcasing a wide array of crafts, including shirts, accessories, bags, and hats, all designed by renowned artists with a commitment to high quality and exclusive presentation. This trend was further fueled by the influence of theater actresses in Paris, such as Sarah Bernhardt, who often set the fashion standard with their attire. Additionally, the tradition of grand social gatherings organized by the French nobility contributed to the vitality of Haute Couture, as these events prompted customers to seek custom-made clothing to stand out rather than opting for ready-to-wear garments. Fashion was a significant expression of French culture, and the French took great pride in it, which contrasted starkly with



America, where literature, particularly poetry and novels, held a more central place in their cultural values (Lynam, 1972; Marrs, 2015).

6.0 King Louis XIV: Originator of the Ideas and Styles of Luxury Fashion

For over three centuries, Paris has held the esteemed position of being the global epicenter of fashion. Even before the revival of Haute Couture, Parisians were renowned for their unwavering passion for fashion. This can be traced back to 1643 when King Louis XIV ascended the throne, marking a pivotal moment in the history of luxurious clothing. According to an article in *The Atlantic* (2022) titled "The King of Couture: How Louis XIV Invented Fashion as We Know It," it is suggested that the origins of fashion development were not in Paris but in Madrid, Spain.

During the past two decades, Spain experienced a golden era of empire building, which significantly contributed to the rapid growth of its domestic economy. The fashion style influenced by Spain during this period was characterized by its strict and rigid nature, reflecting the strength of the nation's powerful physique and ideology. This style predominantly featured the use of black, which held significance as a symbol of calmness, piety, and dignity for the staunchly Catholic Habsburg monarchy in Spain. Beyond its symbolic value, black was also associated with dominance, reflecting the strength and wealth of the Spanish nation, which proudly displayed its affluence during its colonization of the New World. One example of the enduring legacy of Spanish fashion can be observed in the dress code of European judicial attire (Kaiser and Green, 2021).

In the past, the French nobility imported their fashion from various European sources, including Spain for clothing, Brussels for carpets, Venice for lace and mirrors, and Milan for silk. The limited availability of high-quality luxury goods within France at the time compelled the nobility to look abroad for their fashion needs. Furthermore, factors such as politics, economics, and culture did not exert as much influence on fashion and societal tastes in France compared to Spain and Italy (Kaiser and Green, 2021).

Recognizing this discrepancy, King Louis XIV seized the opportunity to transform the fashion landscape in France. He implemented a policy known as "The Court of The Sun King," which aimed to foster the production of furniture, textiles, clothing, and jewelry exclusively within France. This policy had a profound impact on France's economic development by generating employment opportunities, fostering innovation, and advancing technological progress in the French luxury market. French Minister of Finance Jean-Baptiste Colbert famously likened the fashion industry's importance to that of a gold mine in Peru for Spain, emphasizing the tremendous profit potential it offered through export trade. He expressed the belief that "fashion is the mirror of history," reflecting the civilization of the French nation (Claydon and Levillain, 2016).

During King Louis XIV's reign, approximately one-third of Parisians' incomes were derived from employment in the clothing and textile trade sector. The well-being of these workers was a top priority for Minister Colbert, who considered them a national asset. Workers in this sector were members of highly specialized professional associations and were subject to strict national regulations to ensure quality control. This approach aimed to enable them to compete effectively with foreign imports while discouraging competition among themselves. France's commitment to the quality of its fashion was exemplified



when King Louis XIV ordered the burning of a foreign-made coat that did not meet the ministry's standards (Barringer, 2014).

Amid the flourishing luxury industry that King Louis XIV fostered throughout Europe, he solidified his influence by transforming the Palace of Versailles, a former royal hunting lodge located approximately 12 miles from Paris, into a magnificent center that showcased the opulence of the Sun King and his wife, Marie Antoinette. The Palace of Versailles not only housed an extensive collection of luxurious fashions but also served as a venue for exhibitions of fine art, music, theater, garden landscapes, and culinary arts, creating an atmosphere of glamour, opulence, and elegance. Driven by his ambition to uphold French fashion and refined taste, King Louis XIV established a strict code of court dress and etiquette to ensure a stable market for French-made clothing and jewelry. This move was met with controversy in France, as it appeared that King Louis XIV was deliberately driving the aristocracy into bankruptcy to further his fashion interests. However, this action was viewed as essential for both national economic interests and the political survival of the monarchy, ultimately propelling France to become the dominant political and economic power in Europe. France began to assert control over the fashion market, surpassing Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands (Ledbury and Wellington, 2020).

In general, King Louis XIV's charisma played a unique role in shaping French fashion tastes. He was regarded as the ultimate fashion designer, and his passion for theater greatly influenced his Baroque fashion style, characterized by its aesthetic extravagance and drama. This style encompassed elements such as high heels, vibrant red colors, elaborate curls, layered shirts, an abundance of accessories, and a stark departure from the conservative and monochromatic Spanish style. According to Barringer (2014), King Louis XIV viewed fashion as a means of expressing his power to both the nobility and the wider world, believing that proper attire should inspire loyalty, satisfaction, pride, and external admiration.

To ensure that France maintained its position as a fashion influencer, King Louis XIV and his Minister of Finance, Colbert, mandated the seasonal production of textiles, occurring twice a year. This approach aimed to encourage people to purchase more from French textile factories, aligning their choices with seasonal trends established by France. Unlike Spain, where fashion remained relatively consistent and heavily regulated by law, France's fashion landscape was marked by rapid changes in line with the seasons. French fashion prints were often labeled as "hiver" or "été" for winter and summer, respectively, accompanied by corresponding accessories such as umbrellas, face masks, and hand fans for summer, and feathers, capes, and scarves for winter. Light silk fabrics were specially adapted using velvet and satin for winter wear (Borstrock, 2014). As noted by Barber (2015), fashion in France evolved swiftly in response to the changing seasons. This stood in stark contrast to Spain, where continuity in fashion was prized and heavily governed by regulations, including limitations on certain fabrics, clothing types, and textiles for specific social classes. This difference in approach left the French populace more inclined to embrace change, reflecting the nation's character and aligning with the ambitions and economy of their king, as articulated by the French economist Jacques de Savary in his 1675 treatise, "The Perfect Dealer." Savary observed that "the French are naturally changeable," and contemporary fashion was seen as a reflection of the national character, consistent with the king's aspirations and economic interests.



7.0 Sustaining Haute Couture: Development in the Fashion Industry

In the realm of Haute Couture, a highly regimented and specialized industry, various manufacturing techniques such as crafting artificial flowers, embroidery, weaving, buttons, and fabric wrapping are meticulously executed by skilled artisans. These artisans rely on traditional sewing skills and techniques that have been passed down since the 17th century. This rich tradition can be traced back to the legacy of King Louis XIV, which has played a pivotal role in shaping modern French craftsmanship. Haute Couture is not merely a trivial industry; rather, it stands as a pillar of the country's economy and national identity. As Susan Santog aptly puts it, "the French have never embraced the Anglo-American confidence that leans towards casual and practical fashion" (Tamás and Wilkinson, 2005).

João and Neto (2018) highlight that in the mid-19th century, Haute Couture, primarily based in Paris, established a unique fashion system that recognized couturiers and fashion designers as artists. They were responsible for creating and styling luxurious, original garments, particularly in the realm of women's clothing. Couturiers were not just skilled craftsmen but true artists, shaping their creations through the design of high-end fashion. In stark contrast to mass-produced clothing found in stores, Haute Couture embodies exclusivity, often requiring customers to visit the boutique, also known as a "mode house," for meticulous measurements and adhering to high-quality manufacturing and tailoring standards. This process is a time-consuming endeavor, completed in phases to ensure its exclusive essence. Within Haute Couture, there exists a hierarchy of skilled professionals, including dressers, dressmakers, tailors, and pioneers.

One renowned figure synonymous with the Haute Couture industry is Charles Frederick Worth, a British-trained tailor and dressmaker affectionately known as the "father of Haute Couture." Worth's direct involvement with the French silk weaving industry granted him access to and promotion of original and luxurious textiles, which became the foundation of his designs. His clientele consisted of nobility and the bourgeois class, further solidifying Haute Couture's reputation.

In 1868, Worth established the *Chambre Syndicale* of clothing and sewing for ladies and girls, a trade union that handled labor, taxation, administration, and clothing production matters. However, during this period, there was still some confusion regarding the concept of Haute Couture, as it was not clearly distinguished from ready-made garments and confections. It wasn't until 1910 that a specific and unambiguous definition of Haute Couture emerged, reserved for fashion houses producing collections exclusively for private clients and not for regular retail (Bass-Krueger, 2021).

To preserve the quality and exclusivity associated with the Haute Couture "name," the *Syndicate Chamber of Parisian Haute Couture* established specific guidelines. These guidelines were designed to monitor and set rules for evaluating creativity, design, and fabrication quality to meet the unique needs of customers. These measures were implemented to combat the issue of imitation and the unauthorized replication of designs, which posed a significant threat to the Haute Couture industry, relying heavily on exclusivity to maintain high pricing.

In 1929, the *Syndicate Chamber of Parisian Haute Couture* initiated vocational sewing



and design training programs in affiliated schools under the Ministry of National Education in France. The curriculum included a three-year apprenticeship program, with the first year focused on practical sewing skills, the second on garment construction techniques, and the third on sewing and pattern design for women's fabrics. A two-year program was also offered to selected students who aspired to become pioneers in Haute Couture, providing them with the opportunity to train with master tailors and potentially become creative designers. These schools and courses continued to operate until the early 2000s.

In addition to educational initiatives, an organization called PAIS (The Association for the Protection of Seasonal Artistic Industries), founded by Madeleine Vionnet in 1921, played a vital role in safeguarding Haute Couture designs as individual artistic creations. Fashion designs were meticulously documented through photographic records of the garment from various angles, registered with PAIS, effectively protecting intellectual property and maintaining credibility. Violations related to piracy of intellectual property, particularly in the creative industry, were dealt with under the French penal code. In 1943, this service was transferred to the Trade Union Chamber. Throughout the 1930s, this body also formulated various strategies to protect and control the Haute Couture industry, including establishing an official calendar for fashion house shows, fostering collaborations with media, influential figures in the fashion industry, and global buyers (Pouillard, 2016).

By 1939, there were seventy fashion houses dedicated to Haute Couture in Paris. However, the events of World War II from 1939 to 1945, during which Germany occupied France, posed a significant crisis for the Haute Couture industry. The Germans sought to relocate the industry to Berlin or Vienna, but Lucien Lelong, the president of the Trade Union Chamber, successfully negotiated to ensure that Haute Couture remained in Paris. After the war's conclusion, efforts were made to restore the confidence of buyers and manufacturers from North America. The goal was to rebuild France's reputation as the world's foremost fashion hub and bolster the fragile post-war economy. The Trade Union Chamber played a key role in achieving this by organizing fashion exhibitions for commercial buyers in North America, Europe, and interested private clients (Mariani, 2018).

A pivotal moment in the Haute Couture industry occurred in 1947 when it gained recognition as a highly influential force in the post-war era. This recognition came with the emergence of the Christian Dior brand in that year, which was championed by Carmel Snow in the leading fashion magazine *America Harper's Bazaar*. This newfound credibility led the Trade Union Chamber to introduce stricter regulations to maintain the quality and prestige of Haute Couture following the challenging post-war period. Haute Couture was categorized into two classes: Couture and the more prestigious Couture-Création. Each fashion house had to apply for membership and adhere to annual reviews to retain its exclusive status.

The application process for Couture-Création classification by a couturier included several conditions. The couturier had to produce a minimum of twenty-five in-house designed garments for both spring and autumn seasons. These designs had to be created on mannequins and not merely applied to statues. The collection was then presented in a fashion show, featuring models in an environment that encapsulated the Haute Couture ambiance of Paris.



As noted by Pyper (2017), the 1950s marked the heyday of the Haute Couture industry in modern times. During this period, fashion houses that offered the finest Haute Couture services thrived, including iconic names like Christian Dior, Pierre Balmain, and Jacques Fath. The industry also expanded its market reach, selling original and exclusive designs under the stringent control of the Trade Union Chamber. This expansion spurred innovative initiatives within the Haute Couture industry in Paris to assert direct influence on the larger market. For instance, the Christian Dior brand established its own licensing arrangements with the creation of the Dior brand chain based in New York. Similar efforts were undertaken by Jacques Fath and Joseph Halpert's visionary brands to penetrate the American ready-to-wear market. Between 1958 and 1962, the Society Les Couturiers Associés was established by prominent couturiers such as Jacques.



i. Christian Lacroix 1985



ii. Givenchy 1995



iii. Christian Dior 2000

Figure 6: Collection *Haute Couture* 1984, 1995 and 2000

(Source: taken from the archive *Vogue Runway*. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows>)

In the 1990s, LVMH embarked on a mission to acquire renowned brands like Dior, Lacroix, Givenchy, Celine, and Kenzo with the objective of revitalizing these esteemed luxury fashion labels. Their goal was to mold and reestablish the credibility of authentic French luxury fashion leadership, drawing inspiration from the roots of Haute Couture. This strategic move was prompted by the fierce competition posed by the dominant ready-to-wear fashion from Italy and Japan, which held sway over the primary fashion markets in Europe and America.

As part of their restructuring efforts, LVMH adopted a two-pronged approach. First, they sought out celebrity designers who had gained significant recognition in the world of Hollywood fashion. For instance, they enlisted the services of Claude Montana, who had collaborated with Jeanne Lavin from 1990 to 1992. Additionally, LVMH was keen on fostering innovation and radical creativity within these brands. They achieved this by tapping into the talents of visionary young designers like John Galliano and Alexander McQueen for Givenchy.





Voss, 2000



The Overlook, 2000



Peacock, 2011

Figure 7: Collection *Haute Couture Alexander McQueen*
(Source: *Gatagate Magazine*, <https://gatamagazine.com/>)

Furthermore, Karl Lagerfeld embarked on a rebranding journey, breathing new life into the Chloé brand and revamping the iconic fashion house Chanel. He implemented significant changes in design and fashion sensibilities, introducing signature accessories like logos, necklaces, cardigan suits, and tweed ensembles, which have now become synonymous with the Chanel brand. Lagerfeld's influence extended beyond these transformations as he expanded his fashion empire, catering to a younger audience and leveraging the star power of numerous international models and Hollywood celebrities. Among these notable figures were Inès de La Fressange, Catherine Deneuve, Carole Bouquet, Vanessa Paradis, Nicole Kidman, Anna Mouglalis, Audrey Tautou, Keira Knightley, Kristen Stewart, and even the legendary Marilyn Monroe (Mayer and Kelley, 2021).

During the early 2000s, this organization boasted approximately 500 members and actively promoted French fashion both domestically and internationally. This association eventually came under the ownership and leadership of LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy), founded by Bernard Arnault. Haute Couture in the early 2000s served as an experimental and laboratory-like sector within the luxury clothing design business, dedicated to preserving France's identity, heritage, and standing as a leader in luxury taste. Despite Haute Couture not being a highly profitable industry in terms of economic income, it continued to play a pivotal role, contributing only 10% of the overall clothing sales in France during that period. Nonetheless, the concepts and ideas stemming from this industry consistently garnered exclusive attention from top fashion publications such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Elle*, and *Vogue*.

8.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Haute Couture, originally a pivotal concept hailing from France since the era of King Louis XIV, has witnessed rapid growth and evolution, shaping a unique philosophy, principles, and guidelines for the art of crafting clothing with exquisite taste and opulence in France. It has been a comprehensive approach and a reservoir of human wisdom in discerning superior attire, offering a visual representation that showcases individual allure, and



serving as a platform for social manifestation. Nevertheless, as we entered the 21st century, its relevance in the global fashion industry has become a topic of debate.

The advent of ready-to-wear clothing in the 1980s marked a shift in consumer preferences, with Haute Couture gradually losing its luster. Evidently, only a meager 4,000 discerning buyers remain interested in procuring garments from this niche. Some venerable fashion houses like Lanvin, Chanel, and Christian Dior persist in preserving this tradition, not for commercial gains but purely for satisfaction and artistic pleasure. Pierre Berge, the former artistic director of Yves Saint Laurent, has vocally expressed skepticism, declaring, "Haute Couture nowadays is just a joke; anyone claiming it still holds significance is deluded. It is withering away, and its exorbitant prices deter buyers. Introducing rules to govern it is nonsensical."

Furthermore, Berge questioned the existence of true dressmakers in the modern era, emphasizing that individuals who establish and operate their own Couture houses are a rarity, and this age-old tradition no longer garners interest. In contrast, Bernard Arnault, the head of LVMH which owns brands like Dior and Givenchy, staunchly defended Haute Couture as a business that upholds exclusivity and luxury at its core. In this industry, profit in monetary terms takes a back seat, as it is instrumental in crafting an image, bolstering brand value, and establishing credibility. Arnault emphasized that Haute Couture should not relinquish its exclusivity, as it is a breeding ground for innovation and industry-shaping ideas.

However, the ever-increasing focus on profitability in the fashion industry has compelled iconic fashion houses like Christian Dior and Pierre Balmain to blend their Haute Couture creations with ready-to-wear collections, akin to the successful strategy employed by Yves Saint Laurent. In 2021, interest in Haute Couture dwindled by 13 percent, evident in Google searches, where only four out of ten fashion houses managed to retain virtual user attention—namely Chanel, Dior, Fendi, and Valentino.

Nonetheless, Haute Couture remains undemocratic, proudly preserving its rich heritage. It is not merely a fashion genre showcasing luxurious attire, but an ideology rooted in superior tailoring craftsmanship, artistic sensibilities, and a way of life that pays homage to the grandeur of French history. While the world grapples with the relevance of Haute Couture, it steadfastly upholds traditional ethics in its craftsmanship, rituals, and gender divisions. This steadfast adherence to tradition implies that Couture is unlikely to adapt to modern times.

Starting from 2018, Tamara Ralph, a Couture designer for the Ralph and Russo brand, has observed a resurgence of interest in Couture among a new market segment, including the younger generation. This development is encouraging, suggesting a rekindling of appreciation for the true art of couture craftsmanship. In 2022, Haute Couture has evolved beyond its traditional boundaries, catering to the younger generation with fresh, contemporary designs, and leveraging the influence of social media platforms such as Instagram through collaborations with fashion influencers. For instance, Schiaparelli's pendant design from the autumn collection 2020 collection went viral, drawing inspiration from Iris Van Herpen's mesmerizing style and nature motifs.



Younger Couture designers emphasize minimalist concepts over excessive embellishments, favoring a less formal aesthetic that prioritizes artistic intent and the fusion of heritage and creativity. This shift is evident in the Haute Couture Fall 2022 shows by Balenciaga and Dior, where designers Daniel Roseberry and Maria Grazia Chiuri drew inspiration from iconic Haute Couture styles of the past, infusing them with contemporary elements. Working alongside a new wave of creative minds from the younger generation, some designers are seeking to revolutionize Haute Couture. They aim to infuse fresh ideas, embrace sustainability, incorporate environmentally friendly and vegan elements into their collections, all while preserving the essence of opulence and exclusivity. A prime example is Maria Grazia Chiuri, a designer renowned for her meticulous attention to detail. In 2022, she elevated her approach by collaborating with the acclaimed Ukrainian artist Olesia Trofymenko. Chiuri was captivated by Trofymenko's 'tree of life' motif, discovered at Rome's contemporary art museum MAXXI. Chiuri not only engaged Trofymenko to create expansive, multicolored artworks displayed in the garden outside the Musée Rodin for the July show but also integrated the tree's branches, trunks, and roots into the collection. Dior's skilled ateliers embroidered these elements onto silk coats and cotton day dresses, showcasing a seamless fusion of art and fashion.

Collaborating with emerging artists and lesser-known creatives not only distinguishes collections from the mainstream but also imparts a timeless quality to Couture, contributing to the concept of a cherished collector's item. In the realm of fashion, these pieces are crafted with the intention of being cherished across generations. There are numerous skilled designers and artists I am eager to collaborate with, particularly those from the younger generation who offer a unique perspective on the world. I am excited to explore ways to convey the past, exist in the present, and anticipate the future in all my forthcoming collections.

In conclusion, the concepts and ideals of Haute Couture represent a tale of excellence in the design industry and mastery of techniques rooted in historical legacy. Haute Couture will continue to exert a powerful influence on the fashion industry, serving as a guiding philosophy and concept that defines the standards of perfect and elegant attire, preserving the heritage of textile art. This research aims to offer an insightful perspective on fashion history, particularly for academics and industry professionals within the fashion network.

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