



## See Now, Buy Now Model: A Passport to Fashion Brand Equity

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### Abstract

In a market accentuated by globalization and digital consolidation, high fashion brands start to rethink the way of producing, communicating and distributing their supply, adopting the See Now, Buy Now (SNBN) model to guarantee the possibility of instant gratification. Literature has been scarce concerning SNBN as a new paradigm of contemporary fashion, more particularly, in what concerns its relationship with brand equity. This study seeks to identify the critical variables of SNBN and analyze its feasibility in production and consumption of fashion. It has applied a mixed and sequential methodology. The Portuguese case is worth analysing because of its similarities with countries where the fashion and creative industries' role is still uncertain, but still often mentioned and talked about. The results suggested that there is a positive relation between its adoption and brand equity – in particular a more hybrid strategy of adoption, considering its risks and investments.

**Keywords:** See Now, Buy Now model; fashion marketing; brand equity; fashion immediacy; fashion industry.

**JEL classification:** M11; M30; M31; O14; O21.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese fashion industry, similarly to what happened in many other countries, has been enduring a set of threats which raise the question around creative and production methods and the existence, or not, of economic profitability.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the market is suffering a sustained remodeling with simultaneous changes, guided predominantly by a speedy globalization's demand for digitalization and immediacy. In the fashion industry, there is also pressure for a change in the international fashion system, mainly with respect to the fashion weeks scheduling, widely typified as obsolete, seeking to enhance the strength that these platforms represent at

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a marketing and communication level, bringing them as close as possible to the time of purchase (Rocamora, 2017).

The See Now, Buy Now model would offer the possibility of consumers to buy the collection pieces in the moment immediately after its presentation. Adopted by countless brands in the past three years, it's clear brands' efforts in producing, communicating and distributing their collections before their public presentations, offering a product that could be useful to the consumer at the time of the fashion show and suppressing the six months wait to acquire it.

Despite the potential that the model itself holds, the emphasis has been placed on the debate, which has little consensus (Amed and Mellery-Pratt, 2016), among the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative. The Press and fashion creators should reflect on issues such as the limitations in creative processes and difficulties in the production for small scale brands.

So far, in Portugal there isn't much debate about the See Now, Buy Now theory. Nevertheless, it is important to outline that the Portuguese case presents itself as distinctive as there isn't a big Fashion industry which allows its integration in the global fashion talk and discussion (Eytan, 2018).

The study presented seeks to identify the crucial variables of the See Now, Buy Now model and analyze its feasibility within the production and consumption of Portuguese high fashion.

A mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative), inclusive of interview techniques and inquiry through questionnaire and also of the content analysis, is liable of being used, aiming to increase the complexity and rigor of the understanding the object of study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), and, likewise, contribute to the management and to the academy. Effectively, in the search to obtain an understanding referring to the influence of the See Now, Buy Now model in brand equity, the study of Girard *et al.* (2017) presents itself as fundamental by its actuality, its complete theoretical framework and the pertinence of its objectives for the present study. In this sense, the results certify the relevance of See Now, Buy Now, being presented to us as a positive relationship between the model's adoption and brand equity as well as a tendency for consumers to wish for the immediacy and the instant gratification that the model provides.

Despite being a relevant subject, the discussion about it is recent, so literature has been scarce (Vanpoucke, 2016), even nonexistent, regarding the Portuguese case. A literature analysis concerning different intertwined dimensions – such as issues referring to the digitalization and democratization of fashion, consumer experience or brand equity – proves itself to be crucial.

In the present research, Literature Review presents what has been addressed and written by the academy on issues related with the researched topic. Presenting the different methods and sources used, as well as the reasons that substantiate them – and Results – presenting an initial analysis and a crossover between the collected data. Discussion exposes the confrontation of the study's results with what is pointed by the literature, leading to the final section Conclusion, where it's presented the study's summary and stressed its limitations as well as some guidelines for future investigations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Fashion digitalization and e-commerce

The relative impermeability to digitalization that occurs in cultural fields such as music or the arts is not verified in the fashion world, largely because of its capable nature of simultaneously integrating an aesthetic – design – and economic prism in its product (Petkova, 2016). In this industry, the search for profitability and marketing optimization made the adoption of digital practices become a reality and respond to the new ways of producing and consuming (Rocamora, 2017). In this sense, as a way of providing maximum value to consumers, fashion brands have outlined and developed strategies geared towards cyberspace (Kim and Ko, 2010; Batra and Keller, 2016; Petkova, 2016; Rocamora, 2017).

Nowadays, digital communities, blogs and social networks have become part of most people's lives (Kim and Ko, 2010; Crewe, 2013; Escobar, 2016) and marketing itself has evolved and redefined its proceeding to the paradigm of digital marketing's indispensability.

The literature thus clarifies that digitally mediated fashion is not only a transactional opportunity, but an additional work space for the production of desire (Crewe, 2013). The 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the emergence of new forms of reproduction and representation of fashion (Crewe, 2013) largely caused by the substantial and progressive impact of the digital era on the market (Escobar, 2016), making it possible, as never before, to expand and deepen the industry's scope (Crewe, 2013).

Today, the consumer experience is determined by a set of interaction points with the brand, where, in order to be successful, it offers immediate and personalized content to each user (Parise *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, electronic commerce has proved to be particularly relevant, standing out as a significant economic force (Crewe, 2013; Petkova, 2016).

Consumers are supporters of the omnichannel, using several channels until the moment of purchase (Parise *et al.*, 2016). An approach between online and offline is considered relevant, offering the consumer the possibility of using the channel that is the most convenient according to the context (Petkova, 2016).

The literature confirms that the discussion between the physical and the online is no longer important, as is the individual optimization of each channel, passing, instead, the testimony to the way retailers should serve consumers regardless the point of contact (Kim and Ko, 2010; Crewe, 2013; Escobar, 2016; Parise *et al.*, 2016; Petkova, 2016; Rocamora, 2017).

### 2.2 The democratization of fashion and the co-creation of value

Due to its uneasy nature and constant search for novelties (Almeida, 2016), fashion is constantly changing to serve its consumers. It is to them and their way of being that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, brands and designers are, once again, adapting. E-commerce and digital communication have brought about considerable changes in expanding the limits of how, when and where fashion is consumed. They have reduced huge research and transaction costs associated with consumption and knowledge acquisition (Crewe, 2013), ending up, directly or indirectly, making fashion accessible to a large number of consumers (Rosa, 2013).

This question has, naturally, a particular relevance when it concerns high-end brands (Quach and Thaichon, 2017): in the last few years an effort has been made to take advantage of strategies capable of effectively generating immediacy and, therefore, a broadly expanded

range of fashion (Crewe, 2013). From a narrow and homogeneous group of consumers, it switched to several emerging segments that perceive the meaning of fashion in a heterogeneous way (Chandon *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, the potential for expansion of market spaces beyond geographic limits is solidified. The same occurs on the access to fashion knowledge, now permitted and widely in contrast with the control of supply and distribution chains that existed until then (Crewe, 2013).

The present leads to a consumer experience significantly different and transformed from the past: it is factual and increasingly diffuse the real-time delivery, to where and when the consumer wishes, of a well-defined product for each segment (Parise *et al.*, 2016). With the advance and consolidation of the Internet, the appearance of new and close relationships between industry, fashion and the consumer's daily life have been witnessed. Relations capable of producing a new cartography where the most valued knowledge comes from the prism of consumption and the consumer, and not from the production itself (Crewe, 2013).

The co-creation refers to the process through which consumers play an active role and create value together with the company (Kohler *et al.*, 2011). In a broader sense, the value of a good or service does not exist by itself, but it is the result of how consumers, and more specifically customers, perceive and evaluate the situational experiences facilitated by that good or service (Quach and Thaichon, 2017). The advent of the Internet has provided companies with unique opportunities to capitalize on consumers' creative and innovative knowledge and potential, resulting in diverse approaches to collaboration in different parts of the value chain (Kohler *et al.*, 2011). Nowadays, it is clear that consumers have gone from passive receivers to active co-creators in the process of creating value (Crewe, 2013; Quach and Thaichon, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2015).

Typically, co-creation occurs during the innovation process, where product development activities and the elaboration and evaluation of concepts and products are constant (Kohler *et al.*, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). For this to occur, it is essential that the parties engage and, ideally, that the barriers between production and consumption are dissipated (Tynan *et al.*, 2010).

The generalization of social networks and the multiplication of the created content – from the producer (marketer-generated content) and consumer (user-generated content) perspectives (Zhang *et al.*, 2015) – have allowed the action and behavior of those who consume being preferred over those of the intermediaries of the production-consumption relationship. These begin to see their role weakened, in the context of who shapes the perception of brands and knowledge of fashion (Crewe, 2013). Furthermore, consumers are aware of the power they have in the market and that large parts of a brand's actions are carried out for them (Escobar, 2016).

### 2.3 Brand Equity

With the increase of competition levels, globalization and the growing realization that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets for a company, the brand has emerged as a management priority (Girard *et al.*, 2017). This principle is easily validated by the value that a strong brand can add to consumers (Krautz, 2017; Yildiz and Kinden, 2017), reducing the risks perceived at the time of purchase (Scott and White, 2016), increasing competitive power, and avoiding price competition (Yildiz and Kinden, 2017). According to Aaker (2009), a strong brand may even function as a true simplifier of the purchasing decision process.

Lately, companies invest many resources and apply an enormous effort for a considerable period of time in building the value for their brands (Datta *et al.*, 2017). Brand equity has thus become a central construct for a marketing strategy, both in a theoretical and practical perspective (Datta *et al.*, 2017; Keller, 1993; Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Krautz, 2017; Seric *et al.*, 2017). This importance is also noticed due to the increase of literature referring to this concept and measurement of its dimensions (Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Huang and Sarigöllü, 2014; Girard *et al.*, 2017; Yildiz and Kinden, 2017). Nevertheless, the academy shows that there is no consensus either regarding the definition of brand equity or in the methods capable of measuring it (Salinas, 2009; Krautz, 2017; Veloutsou and Guzman, 2017).

Modern marketing recognizes the paradigm of brand equity as an utmost significant strategic asset for organizations (Davicik *et al.*, 2015). In this sense, it is essential to consider the definitions presented by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) given the remarkable visibility that literature provides them (Seric *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, while the former suggests that the brand's value is the set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand that allow to increase (or decrease) the value of the products offered, both for the company and for the consumer (Aaker, 1991). The latter defines it as the differential of brand knowledge on the consumer's response to brand marketing (Keller, 1993).

Despite the approach of both authors from the point of view of the consumer (Seric *et al.*, 2017) and being multidimensional (Girard *et al.*, 2017), Aaker (1991) exposed the concept by identifying brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty as sources of its value (Girard *et al.*, 2017). Keller (1993), in turn, proposed to evaluate the concept through two dimensions of brand knowledge: the awareness and the brand's image (Seric *et al.*, 2017).

Girard *et al.* (2017) theorized about the need for an effective leverage of brand equity, emphasizing the importance of developing more complete communication and marketing programs, endorsement integrators, spokespersons and in-store events, without neglecting the value of advertising to design consumer-type images and use situations. In fact, the value of a brand is built primarily through user experience and publicity, which is highlighted by the reinforcement or framing of these experiences (Girard *et al.*, 2017; Huang and Sarigöllü, 2014). It is therefore important to consider the need to redesign marketing activities with the aim of always adapting them to the latest consumer behaviors and desires (Royo-Vela and Hünermund, 2016).

It is also important to ponder the impact that digital marketing has on brand equity and, in that sense, literature recognizes that web activities, when well succeeded, exceed them (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Kim and Ko, 2012; Godey *et al.*, 2016). The truth is that the role played today by social networks and online communities has become increasingly more decisive for the pursuit of a brand's goals – especially those related to communication (Godey *et al.*, 2016) –, becoming support tools for relationships and activities (Kim and Ko, 2010). This idea can be linked with Cifci *et al.*'s (2016) study, presenting that social value can be achieved through fostering interactions between brand and consumer, and through brand oriented interactions among consumers.

Even despite the conceptual and measurement differences manifested in the academy, most authors agree that strengthening the brand value contributes to the increased preference for one brand over another, for the willingness to pay a higher price and client retention (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Huang and Sarigöllü, 2014;

Lakshmi and Kavida, 2016; Girard *et al.*, 2017; Krautz, 2017; Seric *et al.*, 2017; Yildiz and Kinden, 2017).

After presenting a framework that analyzes the current fashion context and justifies the emergence of the See Now, Buy Now model, the need to understand how these concepts fit with the Portuguese consumer and fashion producer rises. We question the feasibility and need for adoption of the model: will there be production, communication and distribution capacity by designers? Will there be a consumer appeal to that effect? What benefits will be presented at the level of brand equity?

### 3. METHOD

It is by crossing qualitative and quantitative methods that it is forethought that the usage of a mixed methodology allows access to data of different natures and, consequently, to obtain a deeper knowledge of the reality under study. To mention the admission of a sequential methodology, having the results of the press content analysis (1) influenced the development of the interview script (2) and the questionnaire survey (3). In order to avoid biases, a triangulation processes procedure was followed which is "an epistemological claim concerning what more can be known about a phenomenon when the findings from data generated by two or more methods are brought together" (Moran-Ellis *et al.*, 2006). This process increases the accuracy of research findings and boosts the level of confidence in them.

#### 3.1 Content analysis

The inexistence of academic literature and the diversity of opinions that commonly involve the approach to the See Now, Buy Now model, made aware that reading a wide range of newspaper and magazine articles devoted to the subject would be vital. The content analysis was initiated by the need to obtain the maximum knowledge about the subject under study and looking to obtain data that did not depart directly from the subjects investigated (Lee, 2003), and from material that was not produced with the intention to serve the empirical investigation (A. S. Silva and Pinto, 2009).

The research was temporarily held between September 2016 (presentation of the women's collections for Spring/Summer 2017 – first season with brands adopting the model) and March 2018 (the end of the collection's presentations for the Autumn/Winter 2018/19). All the published material where the model was mentioned was collected and analyzed. Given the emphasis that online media enjoys throughout the period of content gathering, only digital media platforms were considered this time.

To make the analysis more systematic, a categorization of the 40 news collected was carried out, based on their content and the different approaches established: the See Now, Buy Now concept, the advantages and disadvantages of the model, the fashion consumer, the creation process and co-creation and the relation with issues associated with technology, fast fashion and immediacy.

#### 3.2 Semi-structured interviews to Portuguese fashion designers

As part of this work oriented by the production angle, it was considered immediately pertinent the development of semi-structured interviews with Portuguese fashion designers.



Through an intentional non-probabilistic sample, issues such as e-commerce and digital marketing, the current fashion calendar, the relationship with suppliers and the processes of production and distribution, its influence on both the creative process and on the marketing/sales policies were addressed. Only then it is possible to obtain a clarification among decision makers in a way that is appropriate and exploratory (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010) and allow, through dialogue, to see how things are, why they happen and what are the participants intentions. (Adams *et al.*, 2014).

The importance of analyzing the phenomenon in question and arguing that it is not a one-size-fits-all construction (Vanpoucke, 2016) partly justifies this method's collection. Only through direct contact between the researcher and his interlocutors and a reduced directivity (Ghiglione and Matalon, 2005) we could have effective gains in the quality of the information obtained for a study like the one that is now exposed. To this purpose, six fashion designers were selected. These Designers regularly present their collections in one of the two Portuguese fashion weeks, ModaLisboa and Portugal Fashion. Questions such as the course and the maturity of the work presented were also considered, thus ensuring the heterogeneity of choice. Then, younger and not so established designers were also selected, such as Carolina Machado and David Catalán, Luís Carvalho and Susana Bettencourt, and established designers, Ricardo Andrez and Luís Buchinho.

The semi-structured interview script was designed for leading the interview, so deviations from the conversation to other topics and concepts were allowed. Then, a categorical content analysis was developed and the data aggregated in a small number of subjects – using the method proposed by Guerra (2006) –, acknowledging that not all information can be used (Creswell, 2014).

Additionally, Agreement Rates was an important step in the validation of these analyses which have identified individuals which reach the same conclusion, based on data coding procedures by Yan and Gray (1994) (See Appendix A).

### 3.3 Questionnaire survey to Portuguese fashion consumers

Given that there could be a positive relation between the possibility of buying a designer piece at the moment immediately after its presentation and brand equity, it was considered opportune to develop a data collection process through questionnaire survey. This process was chosen given the importance of developing a data gathering that, after being examined, allow conclusions to be drawn via a generalization by groups of people (Babbie, 2010).

Prior to the pilot test phase being undertaken, it was defined as the scenario for the two main fashion events in the market in Portugal and the ones that gather the largest number of industry consumers: ModaLisboa and Portugal Fashion. Throughout the process, it was relevant if the sample was representative and reflected the perspective of Portuguese fashion consumers. This led the determination of a random probabilistic sampling, by the ability of its statistical process allowing us to draw conclusions (Campenhoudt and Quivy, 2013).

In a total of 200 respondents, it is possible to verify that there is a greater representativeness of female subjects (62%), being verifiable that the majority of the sample had attended the event (Portugal Fashion or ModaLisboa) at least once (78% of respondents). At the age group level, the average age of the sample is approximately 35 years (with a standard deviation of approximately 13 years), noting that the respondent with the lowest age is 16 years old and the oldest 68 years old. In order to improve analysis, a re-

encoding of the variable in question was carried out, as a way of defining categories with age intervals. In this sense, it can be determined that the majority of the respondents' ages are between 30 and 44 years old, representing about 35% of the sample, followed by those between the ages of 20 and 29 (34%).

In terms of education levels, 43% of respondents are graduated, followed by those with an education level up to secondary education (32%) and then the ones who undertook a master's degree (19%). The remaining response categories related to the level of education have very residual values. 73% of the sample appears to be employed.

Brand Equity measurement was based on the study of Girard *et al.* (2017) (see Table no. 1). The choice is justified by the contemporaneity of the article, the communion of established objectives, and the support in a complete compilation of literature on brand value and ways of measuring its different sources. The truth is that the study examines consumer-based brand equity, where a survey instrument was developed and administered with scale measures pretested. A holistic model is presented based upon the brand equity foundation and current literature.

The perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty were considered for the present study. Each dimension being particularly modified for the study's development and measured by the seven-point Likert scale (1 = Completely Disagree, 7 = Completely Agree) (see Table no. 1). It should be noted that awareness, as a source of brand equity, was not considered due to the impossibility of measuring the ability of consumers to identify a particular brand, before and after the establishment of the See Now, Buy Now model.

The statistical analyzes were performed using SPSS, version 25. The statistical significance value was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table no. 1 – Scale to measure consumer-based brand equity**

| Code | Variable   | A           | SD          |
|------|--|-------------|-------------|
|      | <b>Perceived Quality</b>   | <b>5.64</b> | <b>0.71</b> |
| pv1  | These products are reliable.   | 5.23        | 1.28        |
| pv2  | These products are of poor quality (Reversed).                                   | 6.06        | 0.86        |
| pv3  | The quality of these products is consistent.                                     | 5.63        | 0.93        |
|      | <b>Brand Association</b>   | <b>5.45</b> | <b>0.90</b> |
| bas1 | These products have a positive image compared to a competing brand.              | 5.43        | 1.08        |
| bas2 | These products are an established brand.   | 5.47        | 1.07        |
| bas3 | I respect people who use these products.   | 5.15        | 1.55        |
| bas4 | I like the image of these products.  | 5.73        | 1.09        |
|      | <b>Brand Loyalty</b>   | <b>4.32</b> | <b>1.02</b> |
| bl1  | I consider myself to be loyal to these products.                                 | 4.77        | 1.23        |
| bl2  | These products would be my first choice when shopping for similar products.      | 4.41        | 1.38        |
| bl3  | I would not buy other products of equal quality if these products are available. | 3.48        | 1.44        |
| bl4  | I would recommend these products to family.                                      | 4.54        | 1.26        |
| bl5  | I would regularly buy these products.  | 4.38        | 1.22        |

Note: A: Average; SD: Standard Deviation.

#### 4. RESULTS

Over the past two years, the debate around the See Now, Buy Now model has revealed itself a high relevance topic both for the peers – being considered one of the top ten trends in



the fashion industry in The State of Fashion 2017 ([Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company, 2016](#)) – as for the increasingly globalized fashion consumption.

Widely acclaimed by the specialized press – making evident the triviality of the desire to see a piece, buy it and wear it immediately ([Morand, 2016](#)) –, the model is thus responding to the yearnings and needs of high fashion consumers, increasingly involved in a culture of immediacy and instant gratification ([Friedman and Foreman, 2016](#)). Therefore, the traditional system where the public is forced to wait six months between the presentation of a collection and the possibility of acquiring is refuted ([Cuffe, 2017](#)).

Tommy Hilfiger, a pioneer in the model's use and its faithful defender, often states that the See Now, Buy Now meets its intention to always give the customer exactly what they want, when and how they want ([Jiang, 2017](#)).

#### 4.1 Fashion Consumption

To achieve sales and maintain the commercial success of a brand, customer satisfaction has always been vital. However, consumers today are much more impatient and demanding ([Mounthey and Murphy, 2017](#)). More than ever, the power of the fashion industry is in their hands, transcending the administrative structures, designers or publishers ([Arice, 2016](#)).

In this sense, it is important to emphasize Luís Carvalho's point of view when asked about the need to follow the consumer's thinking regarding supply and the business itself:

*- It is essential to follow the consumer's thinking. Basically, it is for him that we are creating. We should not let this dominate the entire collection, but it is important. Especially for those of us who depend on the Portuguese public, which is a difficult audience with low consumer buying power.* - Luís Carvalho

The trend towards this customer-centricity and the search for a closer contact, if not direct, with the consumer (also motivated, of course, by the consolidation of web 2.0.), leads us to consider a possible disposal of intermediation in the sale process, such as the press, fashion editors, or stylists ([Maisey, 2017](#)). Consumers want what they value and do their own selection and curation, existing therefore a general difficulty in presenting a point of view to consumers since they already have their own ([Petro, 2018](#)).

In fact, this consumer emancipation dictates the need for high brands to obtain in-depth knowledge about their audiences. In Portugal, this research has, until then, been preliminary and the definition of the Portuguese consumer is still uncertain and incapable of generating consensus among Portuguese fashion designers. For example, the variations of opinions among designers regarding the motivations of purchase and the consequent acquisition of a framework where points such as status, design or utility are considered as triggers instigators of purchase.

*- Here the consumer buys the pieces mainly to show that they have them, to display, because of status. Abroad, however, he cares very much about the finishes and the way it is done.* - Ricardo Andrez

*- People buy pieces because they like the model, because they identify with the aesthetics and with the brand's concept.* - Carolina Machado

In this case, the surveys are enlightening: there is a strong tendency to point design and exclusivity as critical factors in the triggering of a purchase – 54.4% and 51.2% of the total respondents assume, in full agreement, that their buying motivations are, respectively, design and exclusivity. In contrast, the price of the pieces, the places where we purchase and the ethical issues are variables visibly stunned by the consumers, representing, in that order, 83.1%, 80.7% and 79.4% of disagreement.

#### 4.2 Digitalization

The consumer's brain has changed with the use of technology, starting to require everything immediately and becoming more easily bored (Clark, 2016). On the production side, it is therefore decisive to realize that the public is no longer the only one who sits in the front rows of fashion shows, but rather a globalized online community (Cuffe, 2017).

It is undeniable that the emergence of the Internet was the main leverage for the end of the traditional fashion system: "For years, this system worked. Shows were limited to press, buyers, and VIPs, with photographers shooting images on film, to be printed in newspapers and glossy magazines and filtered down to readers. And then the Internet happened" (Zerbo, 2016).

Often trade press refers to the changes of the system as a clear approach to the notion of efficiency that millennials are accustomed to (Lockwood and Edelson, 2016). And, possibly because of this, the impact that digital has on young designers begins in the creative process:

*- When I design a collection, I know what environment I want it to go through and I know that when I make a story on Instagram it will. From the beginning I know what I want, how I want it, what feeling I want and even what content I can take advantage of to use on social networks.* - Carolina Machado

There is no discussion regarding the importance of social networks as a communication tool. All the designers interviewed make use of their potential to advertise their work and incite consumption. However, the contact established between consumers and brands makes opinions diverge. If, on the one hand, the interactions can be considered sufficient and valuable for the process of creation and commercialization, on the other hand, the belief in an intangibility is pointed out as an obstacle to a more agile communication.

*- I think that consumers, even with social networks, still find us somewhat inaccessible. People have the feeling that they cannot contact us and do not ask very often. I wish there was a more direct connection with the end consumer.* - Susana Bettencourt

The fact is that when analyzing particularly the Portuguese consumer's choice referring to the purchase process, there is still a tendency to choose the physical environment: 69.4% of respondents prefer traditional commerce, as opposed to e-commerce.

*- The consumer likes to see the piece, to try it. It has happened to foreigner clients who came to Oporto and asked if I did not have an atelier to see my work, to meet me and to buy.* - Carolina Machado

However, it was not only at the level of business-to-consumer (B2C) interactions that the fashion industry has transformed, and the Internet also acts as a driving force for business-to-business (B2B) relationships.

*- Nowadays as my clients [B2B] go less to fairs, they move less from their workplaces or their stores, we already started doing the online commercialization through the images of the lookbook. There are customers who already know me and who order the collection without ever seeing it physically before. – Luís Buchinho*

Thus, it is undeniable the relevance that the online has for obtaining feedback and, consequently, for financial risk reduction in stock production. Presently, talking about risks in stocking and not addressing the dimension of digital influence is imprecise. In fact, the emphasis given by a digital influencer to a designer piece can alter completely the demand response, multiplying orders, resulting in an imbalance between what the brand offers and what the consumer wants (Morand, 2016).

#### 4.3 Fashion Show

The emergence of digital influencers and the consolidation of their position as stakeholders in the fashion sphere has proved to be decisive and a valid marketing tool. In the case of collections' presentations, they have played a prominent role by bringing the runway contents to their followers and making them feel a part of the industry and the events themselves: "(...) You might not be one of the select few to be invited to the physical show, but what does it matter if you saw the show on your screen and purchased the item you saw, both without a crowd or queue in sight?" (Grechko, 2016).

Then, to make a collection reach a number of people that transcends the capacity of a room is significant, especially when, for the designers, the fashion show continues to be one of the highlights of a collection's life:

*- The fashion show factor continues to have a very strong presence at the publicity level of the brand nationally and internationally, because it is something through which people can have a more complete image of what the creator has to offer as a signature, while remaining entertaining in the client's head. – Luis Buchinho*

Fashion shows are increasingly aimed at the consumer, to the detriment of the industry itself. So, progressively, it has been advocated the idea that enjoying a show's energy is more appropriate than reinventing a story six months later (Sherman, 2016).

*- It is really a problem for people to forget about the impact that we are able to create in the fashion show. The ideal would be to sell immediately after. However I don't have the time, I have everybody doing the opposite of me and the platforms where we present advocate something else. – David Catalán*

The "problem", as mentioned by David Catalán, requires therefore a great effort in the creation and maintenance of desire. Each designer finds different ways of getting around the

obstacle, either through public relations and celebrity endorsement, as by the adoption of a supply renewal strategy or, even, of the exclusive sale in the post-fashion show:

*- We keep or increase that desire through editorials or articles that come out in the press. But I get more results from dressing some public figures.* - Luís Carvalho

*- We produce the collection, but, besides that, seasonal pieces are also created to introduce in the supply. Some pieces of the collection, a week after the presentation, start by being put up for sale.* – Ricardo Andrez

*- As there is so much heat at the moment and that kind of euphoria of the new, we end the fashion shows and have customers who immediately come to buy.* – Luís Buchinho

#### 4.4 Fashion Calendar

In the search for a clarification about the current calendar of Portuguese fashion weeks, the consensus prevails referring to the lack of openness of the organizing entities. It is true that the prevailing calendar far outweighs the one that would have been the ideal in the adoption of the See Now, Buy Now model: instead of the collection's conception – design – being elaborated until the fashion weeks' presentations, it ends six months previously; the production phase will have to be completed a month before the collection is exposed publicly, contrary to the current method of producing after presenting; the collection's delivery is, thus, held between the months immediately prior and posterior to the presentation, as a means for an in-season activation (see [Appendix B](#)).

If we also think from the communication point of view, the current schedule makes imperative a demanding planning effort.

*- We are talking about a period of almost six months in which everything cools down. However, I try to think that since my goal at the time of the fashion shows is to promote what I'm sending to stores, I force myself to put aside the most recently presented collection, after, of course, taking advantage of the buzz the event generated.* – Susana Bettencourt

The concern in offering a collection for a specific season has been a factor with a drastic importance reduction, either by the constant supply renewal offered by the big retailers, or by the consolidation of e-commerce as a facilitating resource to the elimination of barriers between geographies ([Friedman and Foreman, 2016](#)). There is a safeguard in showing what the consumers want at that moment to use, contradicting the logic of offering the wrong product at the wrong time ([Roberts, 2016](#)).

*- We might not be able to wear an overcoat in October or November, but we can wear a trench coat, which while being a winter piece, has very different characteristics – it is much lighter, cooler and does not have the weight that has a piece of wool in terms of literal grammage. These are changes which I think are very important to keep up with because they have to do with what goes on in pragmatic terms in the consumer's head and this must be followed, because if it is not, we are creating pieces that are obsolete.* – Luís Buchinho

Considering that in the two events where collections for the cold season – Autumn/Winter 2018/2019 – were presented in the month of March 2018, coinciding period with the introduction of spring/summer 2018 collections in the market, we can verify that 81% of respondents recognizes their preference in attending the presentation of the Spring/Summer 2018 collections.

With the adoption of the new calendar aforementioned, not only the approach to the consumer's thinking and needs would be safeguarded, but also the recognition of a defensive strategy against fast fashion. The truth is that big retail chains such as Zara, HM, ASOS or Forever 21 seek to copy the proposals presented in the fashion weeks and the proposals of production of these designs faster than the creative brands themselves (Diderich, 2016).

*- What we create becomes available much earlier than what the customer needs. Customers wait to buy a winter coat only when they need it and, by then, there are only three more options and possibly options similar to the one I offer. – David Catalán*

In this sense, it should be noted that an action capable of improving the logistic chain and the relations with suppliers, distributors or customers is not enough. Morand (2016) argues that protecting fashion design only becomes possible if the purchase of the first customers occurs upstream, ceasing with the waiting period between the presentation and the sale of the collections to final customers.

#### 4.5 See Now, Buy Now model

The different variables analyzed allow us to obtain a descriptive picture of the changes occurring in the consumption, industry and society contexts that justify the adoption of the See Now, Buy Now model. As all controversial strategic changes, opinions against and in favor are considered, however it is widely presented by the press the view that fashion at high speed is not a matter of whether, but when and how (Edelson, 2016). In an interview with Vogue Portugal, Luís Buchinho argues, furthermore, that it is unavoidable for the future of fashion to go through the See now, Buy Now model (Matos, 2018).

In fact, if we take into consideration the consumer's perspective, this is a system that dignifies it, such is the proximity existent between what the market wants and what the industry offers (Amed and Mellery-Pratt, 2016): experts argue that consumers already find themselves with the mindset of this Buy Now (Clark, 2016).

The analysis of high fashion consumption in Portugal presents itself as revealing in this matter: of the two hundred respondents in the two main national fashion events, 96.5% recognize the pleasure in buying the pieces in the moment immediately after the fashion show.

*- The consumer immediately wants things. People buy these pieces on impulse and do not want to wait six months. Especially because six months from now they will already want something else. – Ricardo Andrez*

Nevertheless, the discussion arises, precipitously, from the implications that See Now, Buy Now entails on the organizational skills and financial muscle level required (Lockwood and Edelson, 2016). The system's own operationalization has repercussions along the entire value chain - from creation to commercialization (Sherman, 2016).

The truth is that catching up with an industry that demands incisively to be the fastest won't be for all players: what is certain for the big ones like Burberry, might not be for a young designer (Zerbo, 2016) or to a smaller brand, without financial capacity or infrastructure to invest in preorders probably required (Lockwood and Edelson, 2016).

*- I think there is the capacity to adopt this model in Portugal. However, to do it well and maintain profitability I think only brands and designers associated with large groups can achieve it. – Ricardo Andrez*

It is also important to point out that, on this angle, smaller brands are placed at a disadvantaged position, presenting a certain inability to control the production and commerce and without great marketing skills (Sherman, 2017). The relevance of a hybrid model adoption is, therefore, protuberant (Morand, 2016) and in Portugal it is equally prestigious.

*- Using See Now, Buy Now on the supply side, picking some pieces, being assertive and selling them right away. I think it is a good way of maintaining the balance and not having to invest in a brutal way. – Ricardo Andrez*

*- What I think is more probable in the coming years and that approaches the concept is to produce a smaller collection, at least the collection I make available for sale. If the consumer likes another piece of the fashion show and it is not a part of this set, he can't have it, unless it is the one from the fashion show. – Susana Bettencourt*

In parallel with these different ways of using the logic of the model in different business structures, it is incumbent to us to note that the model was introduced in Portugal by the online trading platform Minty Square, seeking to presell exclusive pieces from the collections of Portuguese creators directly of the fashion shows (M. Silva, 2017). David Catalán and Luís Buchinho were two of the designers invited to collaborate with the initiative, though both acknowledge that the results translate into higher gains in marketing than sales. Moreover, this is similarly a prominent point in the international press: even if the model does not represent immediate sales, generating consumer interest and curiosity can be estimative (Abnett, 2016).

However, the simplicity of the model is only apparent, and its adoption has repercussions on all the links of a global chain (Lobo, 2016). The complete systematization of the model implies a complete inversion of the current fashion system.

*- People would have to be seeing in the fashion magazines now what's in the stores now, which is what was on the runway yesterday. The production of all this has to be done. I do not think it is impossible and, indeed, I even think it could be very easy, but it would be an inversion of the system. - Luís Buchinho*

Natalie Massenet, founder of Net-a-Porter, points to the attachment to traditions and a certain laziness in rethinking the production chain as the real motivations for resistance to this new business model (Camargo, 2018). Even so because some results achieved are



unequivocal: a significant increase in sales, an increase in consumer involvement, with special emphasis on those who are familiarized with the digital, and the acclamation of exclusivity (Maddalena, 2018).

#### 4.6 Brand Equity

Exploring the impact that the implementation of the See Now, Buy Now model may have on the equity of Portuguese high brands is made possible by the questionnaire survey applied to Portuguese fashion consumers. The three sources of brand value assigned to the present study - perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty - allow us to understand how the model reacts in three different valences.

It was analyzed the degree of agreement by two different prisms: individually, for each indicator, and by brand value source since each indicator represents one of the three sources.

It is possible to note that, given the average of responses provided, the quality of the products (pv2, reversed), the image of the products (bas4) and the consistency of the products (pv3) are the three indicators with greater agreement, all presenting an average response greater than 5.63. In opposition, the non-purchase of products of equal quality if the brand products are available (bl3), the regular purchase of branded products (bl5) and products as first choice (bl2), obtained an average agreement below the 4.50, being, therefore, the three indicators with lower agreement (see [Table no. 1](#)).

The exposed scenario immediately allows us to comprehend a clear tendency to increase perceived quality in the context of the adoption of the See Now, Buy Now model. In fact, if we observe the average agreement of each source of brand equity, we can see that perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty represent, respectively, 5.64, 5.45 and 4.32 of agreement.

The See Now, Buy Now model, in a hypothetical scenario like the one presented to the fashion consumers surveyed, facilitates a positive impact on brand equity, with a notable increase in perceived quality of high fashion products. The same impact, however, is not observable in consumer loyalty to brands.

It is also relevant to test the impact of some indicators – namely, (1) the first time presence in the event; (2) the pleasure of buying the pieces from the collections after the fashion show; (3) the preference in watching the Spring/Summer 2018 or Autumn/Winter 2018/2019 collections – in the brand equity, in a setting where See Now, Buy Now is adopted. A sample size larger than 30 allows the T-test to be performed, given the approximation of the T distribution to the normal distribution, both of which lead to the same conclusions (Pestana and Gageiro, 2014). T-test for two independent variables was performed and the results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the groups with respect to the score attributed to the brand equity [(1):  $t(54) = -1.31$ ,  $p = 0.20$  | (2):  $t(198) = 1.68$ ,  $p = 0.10$ ] (see [Table no. 2](#)), existing a concordance in the responses in relation to brand equity regardless of the characteristics considered. However, regarding the preference in attending the presentation of collections by season, there are statistically significant differences between groups [(3):  $t(198) = 1.96$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ] (see [Table no. 2](#)). More specifically, participants who show interest in attending collection's presentations regarding the season of the survey (Spring/Summer 2018 as opposed to Autumn/Winter 2018/2019) are associated with a higher score attributed to brand equity.

**Table no. 2 – T-Test results for two independent variables comparing brand value in different indicators**

| Variable   | Brand Equity<br>n = 200 |     |                     |     | T-Test   |
|--|-------------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|----------|
| (1) First time presence in the event   | Yes (n = 44)            |     | No (n = 156)        |     |          |
|  | A                       | SD  | A                   | SD  | <i>t</i> |
|  | 4.89                    | .87 | 5.06                | .57 | -1.31    |
| (2) Pleasure in buying collection pieces after the fashion show                            | Yes (n = 193)           |     | No (n = 7)          |     |          |
|  | A                       | SD  | A                   | SD  | <i>t</i> |
|  | 5.04                    | .64 | 4.62                | .82 | 1.68     |
| (3) Preference in watching the Spring / Summer 2018 or Autumn/Winter 2018/2019 collections | SS 2018 (n = 162)       |     | AW 2018/19 (n = 38) |     |          |
|  | A                       | SD  | A                   | SD  | <i>t</i> |
|  | 5.07                    | .62 | 4.84                | .74 | 1.96     |
| (4) Gender   | Male (n = 76)           |     | Female (n = 124)    |     |          |
|  | A                       | SD  | A                   | SD  | <i>t</i> |
|  | 5.14                    | .69 | 4.95                | .61 | 2.01     |

Note: A: Average; SD: Standard Deviation.

In the search for an understanding referring to the influence of some variables of sample characterization in consideration of See Now, Buy Now as a lever of brand equity, it is considered relevant to analyze the indicators gender and age.

The results indicate that, regarding the respondents' age, the variable has no significant impact concerning the relation between the adoption of See Now, Buy Now and the brand equity, and, for this purpose, the correlation between the two variables ( $r = -0.01$ ,  $p = 0.92$ ) was estimated. In relation to the gender variable, a T-test for two independent variables was performed and the results indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the groups [(4):  $t(198) = 2.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ] (see Table no. 2). In a scenario where the model is applied, the male subjects scored brand equity significantly more positively, which seems to indicate that for this group there is a relationship between the adoption of See Now, Buy Now and a higher brand equity.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The present study appears to be relevant in terms of the contents exposed, representing in some cases a contrasting scenario when compared to the literature review that was undertaken.

As pointed on several occasions, the digital revolution and the consolidation of e-commerce are evident causes of the fashion business evolution as an increasingly accelerated and global structure, mirroring the gradual need to adopt the See Now, Buy Now model. As suggested by Rocamora (2017), there is a clear trend towards the adoption of digital practices in the fashion world, also visible in the picture drawn by the Portuguese designers interviewed: all point out the potentialities of social networks and the Internet to communicate and commercialize. E-commerce is, in fact, part of everyone's sales strategy, except for Ricardo Andrez, who, although not having an online store, reveals that the contact established through the Internet is a great sales engine.

The development of this project made it possible to understand that the web's impact is not only present at the stages of communication and commercialization, existing also significant repercussions in the creation itself. The academy, by the words of Kohler *et al.*

(2011) and Quach and Thaichon (2017), deals with co-creation as a notable part of the contemporary value chain and its recognition is largely related to the development of cyberspace, as pointed out by Crewe (2013). In fact, the growing highlight given to the consumer becomes unquestionable, placing their thinking on the agenda of high brands, as well as the enhancement of the Internet as the ideal vehicle for establishing a relationship between creation and consumption, as the guarantee of interaction and feedback acquisition. There is still a permanent thoughtfulness in clarifying that consumer opinion is not decisive and does not change the supply on its own, contrary to some press articles that convey the idea of an integral customer-centricity, where the consumer overlaps the creator.

The increasingly democratized access to fashion is mirrored in the theoretical and practical perspectives presented. The Portuguese fashion design and literature, enlightened by Quach and Thaichon (2017), agree that consumption today is more heterogeneous, and marketing has to be thought for more comprehensive targets. An irrefutable example of this democratization is the transformation of the fashion show concept – if it was initially thought for the specialized critical mass, today it is considered one of the most important communication tools for the inclusiveness it guarantees, that is, a gradual massification made possible by the advent of the Internet.

It is trivialized, this way, the concern in the establishment of strong brands, in which the artistic equity of each designer is attested, as pointed by Yildiz and Kinden (2017). Effectively, the brands developed with the work of the interviewed designers. In all cases, for which they give their own name are partly sustained by the accreditation that their products obtain from consumers.

It is, then, created a substantial differential in relation to other brands, acting, furthermore, as a lever to allow consumers to pay more for a certain product or, at least, to associate them to important factors such as status, quality or exclusivity.

In relation to this idea are the considerations made by designers regarding the robustness that today a brand must have, as well as the importance of being faithful to its own aesthetics, contributing for the creation of a cohesive image in the consumer's mind.

As enhancing tools of the increase of brand value, communication strategies that combine events, celebrity endorsement and/or public relations are widely acclaimed, in almost total agreement with what is presented by Girard *et al.* (2017). Likewise, e-commerce and digital marketing are pointed out as an important resource for a brand activation and the leverage of value, making the Portuguese design consent with what Godey *et al.* (2016) and Kim and Ko (2012) expose. The understanding that the greater the value of a brand, the greater are the benefits, that are reflected throughout its different business phases, is widely argued by all views that the present study entails.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Throughout history, high fashion has proven to have an unmatched adaptable capacity, not only in terms of creative aspects, but also in the business structure that accompanies it. Today, perhaps more than ever, not being few the challenges that jeopardized the current fashion system, this efficiency and valency is put to the test.

Some of the most current consumer trends have led us to consider the See Now, Buy Now model as the appropriate strategy for the demanding fashion future and the present study has thus traced the main goal of the identification of critical variables of the model

throughout the different stages of development of Portuguese high fashion. Issues such as digitalization and immediacy, the democratization of fashion, and the presentations and the fashion schedule were recognized, allowing, this way, to find an understanding regarding the conjuncture of contemporary fashion business preservation. In the same way, it became possible to understand the feasibility of the See Now, Buy Now adoption and the implications for the Portuguese fashion consumer and the value of high brands.

The model under study was, along with the decision-makers – the fashion designers –, widely considered as opportune and evaluative for their brands. Nevertheless, its full adoption has different implications at different levels and at different stages of the value chain: in the production methods of the collection, in the scheduling of presentations and in the distribution and commercialization system itself.

It was suggested that if, on the one hand, the model presents the possibility of offering a product in season to the consumer – catalyst, even, of the buzz generated in fashion shows – on the other, the pursuit of goals is the stronger the more decisive is the rupture with the current calendar and fashion system. Given the indispensability of balancing between the risks and the investment and the opportunities and profits that come from the model's adoption, the bet on a hybrid solution was, for this embryonic phase of See Now, Buy Now in Portugal, advocated and considered safe and balanced, being, then, given a quick response to consumer needs but only with part of the collection available.

As in this case, a large part of the transformations that occur in fashion at a global level emerges from the demand to accompany the consumer and their desires, ideas and expectations. Another of this study's conclusions is related to the impact that the See Now, Buy Now model has on Portuguese fashion consumers. Not only does it guarantee the instant gratification that consumers increasingly expect and demand, their preferences and buying desires, as comprehensive publics of an increasingly democratized fashion.

The same was ratified within brand equity, proving the existence of a positive relation between the model and the three sources of brand equity analyzed through the work of [Girard et al. \(2017\)](#). – (1) perceived quality, (2) brand association and (3) brand loyalty. Also, to be mentioned is the significant consideration of See Now, Buy Now as a brand equity enhancer for respondents who show interest in attending collections presentations regarding the season at the time of the survey application – Spring /Summer 2018 as opposed to Autumn/Winter 2018/2019.

This study presents valid contributions both for the academy and for management, due to the inexistence, until then, of literature that addresses the applicability and main consequences of the See Now, Buy Now model in Portugal.

From the theoretical point of view, the study conveys a crossover between different perspectives and concepts that enable a greater knowledge focused on the main influencers dynamic of the current fashion system. The radiography outlined to Portuguese fashion production and consumption moves forward with a significant progress in the understanding of the artistic and organizational structures and practices of Portuguese fashion design, with direct contributions to the areas of marketing, management and fashion design.

From the management's point of view, a guideline is presented that contemplates different interpretations and is capable of reducing the risk and offering greater assertiveness in the patterns of adoption of the See Now, Buy Now model. There is also a greater knowledge of the Portuguese consumer, ranging from their motivations and preferences to the awareness of the best means and structures to achieve it. In this sense, it is possible to highlight some

conclusions such as the importance of combining the physical and virtual means in the supply, the emphasis on design and exclusivity as the main motivations of consumption of high fashion brands and the reduced frequency of purchase of these products in Portugal.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the main limitations regarding the present study is the scarcity of literature referring to the See Now, Buy Now model, which is even non-existent in Portugal. In addition, the intention to study the model's influence on the equity of the Portuguese high fashion brands with consumers in a prism other than the hypothetical was inconceivable due to the nature of the study's object and its remarkable contemporaneity. Therefore, it is considered relevant to apply a longitudinal study that accompanies the brands throughout the process of the model's adoption, and, thus, capable of also recognizing brand awareness as an important source of brand equity. It should also be noted that the absence of an institutional voice that addresses the theme from the point of view of Portuguese fashion events' organizers can serve as a recommendation for future research.

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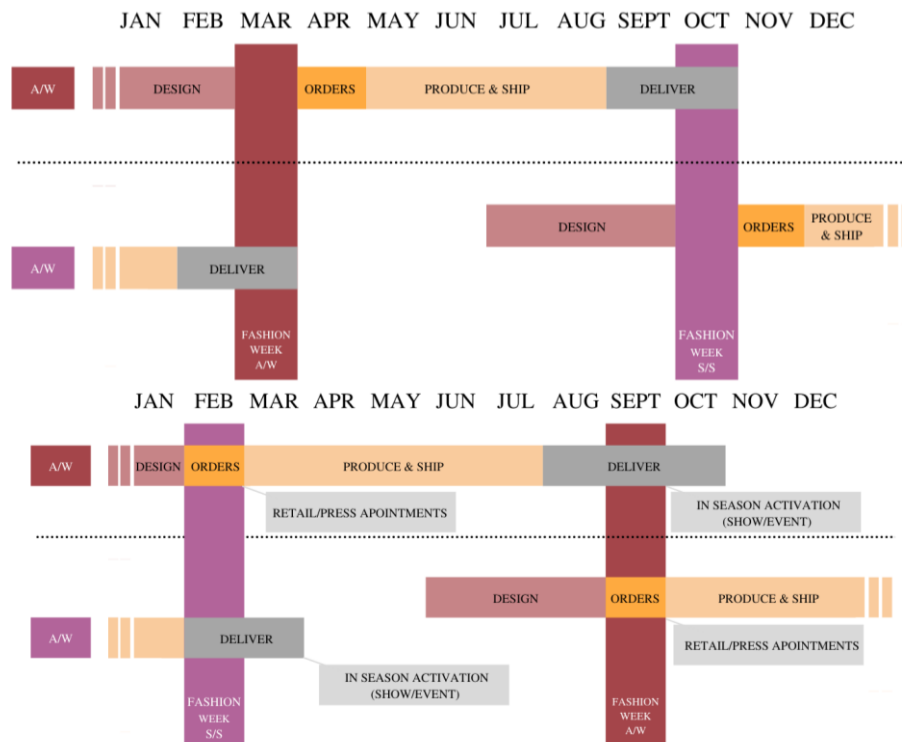
## Appendix A

Agreement Rates between responses of Portuguese fashion designers on semi-structured interviews

| Variables                           | Interviewed designers |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Brand maintenance difficulties      | High                  |
| Collections' profitability          | High                  |
| Designer-consumer relationship      | Modestly high         |
| Digital impact                      | High                  |
| Consumer preference for omnichannel | High                  |
| Fashion show importance             | High                  |
| SNBN adoption in Portugal           | Modestly high         |

## Appendix B

Current Portuguese fashion calendar and fashion calendar with the adoption of the See Now, Buy Now model [Adapted from [Council of Fashion Designers of America \(2016\)](#)]



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