

The (im)materiality of the (sustainable) fashion product

A (im)materialidade do produto de moda
(sustentável)



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ABSTRACT


The ephemeral consumption, a result of the human existential emptiness, awakens society to the unsustainability of contemporary lifestyle in the long term, in which the fashion product is the exacerbated representation of this period. Considering the mediator role of the designer in this scenario, we aim to analyze the (im)material performance of the sustainable fashion product from the fashion designer's perspective. To this end, we conduct exploratory-descriptive research, of a qualitative-quantitative approach structured in three phases: (1) narrative literature review, (2) data survey, and (3) comparative analysis. Thus, through interviews with 10 (ten) fashion designers from different companies, and supported by typologies of user value, it was possible to observe that the attributes, efficiency, esteem, ethics, aesthetics, and spirituality were the most pointed out, with emphasis on product efficiency. These results allow us to conclude that the fashion industry still has a long way to go in order to establish a product that is truly aligned with a "more sustainable fashion".

KEYWORDS

Fashion design; User Value; Sustainability.

RESUMO

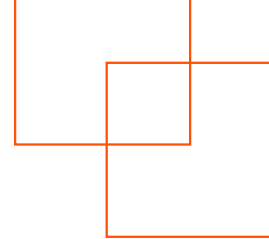
O consumo efêmero, fruto do vazio existencial humano, desperta a sociedade para a insustentabilidade do estilo de vida contemporâneo a longo prazo, no qual o produto de moda é a representação exacerbada desse período. Considerando o papel mediador do designer nesse cenário, objetivamos analisar a atuação (i)material do produto de moda sustentável na perspectiva do designer de moda. Para tanto, realizamos uma pesquisa exploratório-descritiva, de abordagem qualitativo-quantitativa, estruturada em três fases: (1) revisão narrativa da literatura, (2) levantamento de dados e (3) análise comparativa. Assim, por meio de entrevistas com 10 (dez) estilistas de diferentes empresas, e apoiados em tipologias de valor do usuário, foi possível observar que os atributos, eficiência, estima, ética, estética e



espiritualidade foram os mais apontados, com destaque na eficiência do produto. Esses resultados permitem concluir que a indústria da moda ainda tem um longo caminho a percorrer para estabelecer um produto verdadeiramente alinhado com uma “moda mais sustentável”.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Design de moda; Valor do usuário; Sustentabilidade.



INTRODUCTION

The paradox of freedom versus self-control (LIPOVETSKY, 2004) and choreopolitics versus choreopolice (LEPECKI, 2011) represent contemporary relations by emphasizing that the sociopolitical devices that make an individual free are also the same ones that imprison him. In this same sense, Bauman (2001) comments that the possibilities in times of liquid modernity are exercised by the seduction of a leader to his influencer, which transmutes the personality of this influenced individual.

Hyperconsumption and hypernarcissism are implications of the previous paradoxes, present in the current seduction society or liberal hypermodernity, massified and resigned, but equally individualistic and anguished, with an aversion to obsolescence, and that consumes novelties in an uncontrolled way justified by the cyclical device of seduction capitalism: to please and impress (GONÇALVES, 2011; LIPOVETSKY, 2020). An example of this dynamic is fashion which experiences a discontinuity of its social hierarchy character through democratization and greater tolerance of fashion trends and, on the other hand, the beauty that has become more rigid (LIPOVESTKY, 2020).

In this scenario of society and seduction capitalism, it becomes necessary to discuss the problem that involves hyperconsumption: mass production and excessive consumption. It is noteworthy that this research understands sustainability as being

every action aimed at maintaining the energetic, informational, physical-chemical conditions that sustain all beings, especially the living Earth, the community of life, society and human life, with a view to their continuity and still meeting the needs of the present and future generations, in such a way that natural goods and services are maintained and enriched in their capacity for regeneration, reproduction and coevolution (BOFF, 2017, p.100)

In terms of mass production and overconsumption in the fashion industry, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation report (2017) points out that there is an emergency to look at negative externalities - costs to third parties with no direct relation to the production chain (QIN; HARRISON; CHEN, 2019) - of the fashion industry, which add up to billions of

dollars, and other billions are incinerated annually by garments discarded by the user. Also, according to the report, twenty percent (20%) of the polluted water coming from the industry is from the textile industry and less than one percent (1%) of the materials used to produce a fashion product is recycled for the production of a new product.

Design, which "corresponds to a project attitude in meeting the needs of individuals contextualized in their territories" (QUEIROZ, 2018, p.17), as well as its professional, the designer, are important elements in this discussion of hypermodernity, which questions the current (im)material culture. Therefore, reflecting on (im)materiality is crucial to conceive this new reality.

Based on what was exposed, we wondered: how is the (im)material performance of the sustainable fashion product? Then, from the designer's point of view regarding the value of the sustainable fashion product, we aim to analyze the (im)material performance of the sustainable fashion product from the fashion designer's perspective.

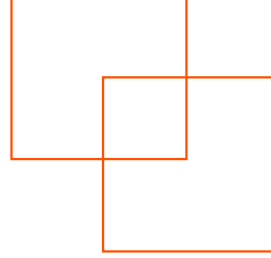
2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Given the previously described objective, this research acquires an exploratory-descriptive character with a quali-quantitative approach for data collection (GIL, 2010). Thus, the research is structured in three stages, as organized in Table 1. The first is (1) a narrative literature review, which deals with the idea of sustainable fashion product and the concept of value in the context of a fashion product. The second is (2) data collection, where data is collected with the group of interest in the research, in this case, fashion designers. And the third is (3) comparative analysis, where a parallel is drawn between the data obtained in the data survey with the information obtained in the narrative literature review.

Table 1 - Characterization and phases of the research. Source:

SEARCH STRUCTURE			
CHARACTERIZATION	EXPLORATORY		DESCRIPTIVE
STAGES	(1) Narrative Literature Review	(2) Data Survey	(3) Comparative Analysis

Source: prepared by the authors (2022).

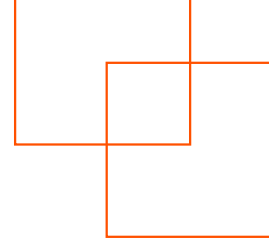


The first stage of the narrative literature review, presented in the Theoretical Framework section, presents bibliographies for a historical contextualization of the fashion product, from its emergence to the contemporary moment, with emphasis on the (im)material value of the sustainable fashion product. The review is based on authors of reference for this theme and that bring tools as a contribution to conduct the research. Examples are the idea of "more sustainable fashion" by Salcedo (2014) and the "user value typologies" by Holbrook (1999).

The second stage, data collection, presented in the Results section, is presented through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. We choose this technique considering the possibility of developing a logical line of reasoning, however, with the opportunity to explore other issues that arise during an interview (GIL, 2010). In this stage, we delimit the group of interest, fashion1 designers, with the preparation and testing of the interview script and the approval of the project of Nishimura (2018) by the Ethics Committee on Research with Human Beings of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (CEPSH - UFSC), under decision number 2.345.889 and Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation (CAAE) 73330217.7.0000.0121.

For delimitation of the group of interest - research universe - groups of any nature that brought together sustainable fashion companies in the metropolitan region of Florianópolis are researched. As it was not possible to find a group in the region, the perimeter was expanded and, through the social network Facebook, it was found the Núcleo de Moda Sustentável, a research group of the Design department of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, which performs the mapping of sustainable fashion companies in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre.

In the mapping, there are 38 (thirty-eight) sustainable fashion companies, of which half work with footwear and accessories. From the principle of affinity between fashion and clothing, and the need to have a research cutout, it was decided to verify only companies that work with sustainable fashion clothing, which a total of 19 (nineteen) companies. After contact via e-mail, only 01 (one) of the companies did not reply, however, 08 (eight) were not available to grant face-to-face



interviews during the week the interviews were applied. This way, from the universe of 19 (nineteen) companies that work with sustainable fashion clothing in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, a sample of 10 (ten) designers from different companies was delimited for data collection.

The interviews were conducted in the company's store or atelier, with a semi-structured questionnaire with the theme of (im)material performance of the sustainable fashion product, audio-recorded with the interviewee's consent and transcribed to a text document, in order to enable content analysis by Bardin's method (2009), pre-analysis, material exploration and treatment of results, inference and interpretation.

The last stage, comparative analysis, presented in the Final Considerations section, is composed of the comparison of information and data obtained by the narrative literature review and data survey, which lead to analyses about the (im)materiality of the sustainable fashion product from the literature and the fashion designer points of view.

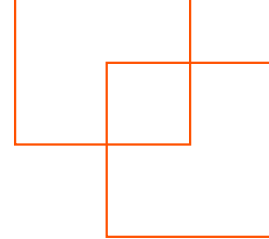
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section addresses the themes that cover the research, based on the current literature: (sustainable) fashion product and the value of the fashion product in the dimensions of (im)materiality.

3.1 Fashion product (sustainable)

The term fashion is widely used to characterize clothing; however, clothing could not always be considered fashion. Matharu (2011) comments that clothing represents the physical dimension of body protection functionality, the piece of clothes, while fashion represents clothing in the dimension of aesthetic variations related to a social and temporal value.

From the etymological point of view, Avelar (2011) states that the word fashion is characterized in the sense of a trend that, paradoxically, addresses the collective understanding and singularity. Under the domain of sociology, fashion is characterized as a system of social regulation through aesthetics that has spread through clothing

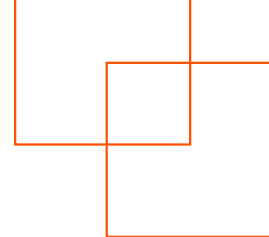


(LIPOVETSKY, 1987).

In historical evolution, fashion as a system of social regulation appears at the end of the fourteenth century, in Europe of the Middle Ages, from the moment that the silhouette of the body is displayed through clothing (FOGG, 2013). Lipovetsky (1987) calls this first moment "Aristocratic Fashion", in which the relations of European society are reconfigured due to the rise of the bourgeoisie that seeks its prominence before the aristocracy in the dispute for attention, the cult of novelty, and maintenance of appearances. According to Lipovetsky (1987), the time from the mid-nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century is called "Hundred Years Fashion", in which occurs the organization of the fashion system, in contemporary molds, to the emergence of haute couture. According to the author, the designer Worth marks the history of fashion by creating fashion shows, defining the fashion calendar in seasons, and setting trends in the fashion industry through his innovations. Haute couture continues to exist, but another moment appears in the middle of the twentieth century, called "Open Fashion", highlighting the prêt-à-porter, which has the same proposal as haute couture, offering fashion trends, but at a more affordable price (LIPOVETSKY, 1987). The end of the twentieth century is represented by another moment in fashion, called "Consummate Fashion", in which fashion loses its privileged character and reaches collectivity (LIPOVETSKY, 1989).

As mentioned in the introduction, fashion is currently characterized by being more democratic and tolerant, as well as an open system (LIPOVETSKY, 2020). In addition to haute couture and prêt-à-porter, the contemporary fashion system is composed of fast fashion and models for sustainability in fashion as slow fashion. Fast fashion represents the exacerbation of the ephemerality of the original fashion system, in which occurs the reproduction on a large scale and at a fast pace of fashion trends, to obtain low cost and reach a large audience, and slow fashion, despite the word is opposite to fast fashion, in practice, the movement seeks to re-signify fashion through more sustainable business models (FLETCHER, 2010; GWILT, 2014).

It is possible to list even more models for sustainability in fashion present in the literature, such as sustainable fashion, ethical fashion,



eco-fashion, fair trade, zero waste, circular economy, upcycling, recycling, collaborative economy/collaborative consumption (LEE; MENDES, 2021). Lee and Mendes (2021) comment although some models are named sustainable, they cannot be considered ecologically benign. Thus, the scheme elaborated by Salcedo (2014) of "more sustainable fashion" stands out, which encompasses the usual movements that have emerged in recent decades – eco fashion, ethical fashion, and slow fashion – to evaluate current practices in the fashion industry and making them more sustainable. For the author, eco-fashion has an ecological bias, focused on awareness of the use of materials and practices that have a low impact on the environment; ethical fashion is more comprehensive, also focusing on people, concerning the wearer's and worker's health; and slow fashion is a movement that seeks to address proposals to guide the fashion business to a more conscious and ethical production, which values the environment, people and seeks local development.

Taking into consideration the concepts around the "more sustainable fashion", it is possible to point out the context of the circular economy - "an economy built from social systems of production-consumption that maximize the service produced from the linear flow of material and energy nature-society-nature" (KORHONEN; HONKASALO; SEPPÄLÄ, 2018, p.39) - and of the fashion product from the creative economy - creative products, which result from a creative process but have added economic value (HOWKINS, 2002) - because as Ceglia (2020) suggests, a reinterpretation of the circular economy through the creative economy can bring practical and viable sustainable solutions in the face of the scarcity of creativity in circularity.

It is also noteworthy that in slow fashion the designer has a key role in change towards sustainability due to its mediating position between production and consumption, which allows proposing and execute innovative and value-generating ideas, based on the environment, society, economy, and culture (HETHORN; ULASEWICZ, 2008; FLETCHER, GROSE, 2011; QUEIROZ, 2014).

3.2 Fashion product value

Summarizing what was observed previously by etymology, fashion is about functionality and experience, attributes that act in the dimension of the (im)materiality of the product. This discussion approaches marketing in its essence, after all, it analyzes the result of tangible and intangible benefits related to the product (KOTLER; KELLER, 2012).

In the marketing field, Holbrook (1999) defines four fundamental properties of value. (1) the user's interaction with the product; (2) the relativism of opinion, which can be evaluated by comparison with other products in the same sector; the user's change of preference in a period; and the user's variation of demand conditioned to the situation of the act of purchase; (3) preference, which entails the primary judgment of the product; and (4) experience, which encompasses the immateriality of the product and instigates the user's desire.

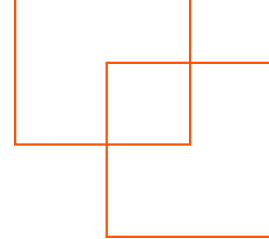
In this logic, Holbrook (1999) builds a model of typology from attributes of consumer user value, which can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Typology of consumer value.

		EXTRINSIC	INTRINSIC
SELF-ORIENTED	<i>Active</i>	(1) Efficiency	(5) Entertainment
	<i>Reactive</i>	(2) Excellence	(6) Aesthetics
ORIENTED	<i>Active</i>	(3) Status	(7) Ethics
	<i>Reactive</i>	(4) Esteem	(8) Spirituality

Source: Holbrook (1999, p. 12).

The typology proposed by Holbrook (1999) are based on extrinsic value, functionality, or intrinsic value, experience; on self-oriented, own consumption, or oriented, consumption for the other or for a cause; and active, the user interacts with the object domain, or reactive, the object reverberates sensations in the user. In detail, it refers to (1) efficiency to characterize the overall performance of the product; (2) excellence to assess whether the product exceeds performance and quality expectations in order to achieve market

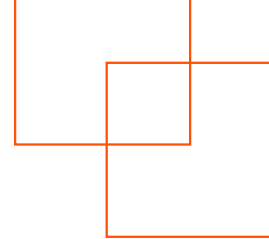


differentiation; to (3) status to analyze whether the product provides prestige to the user in his/her social group; to (4) esteem as a result of social validation of product use; to (5) entertainment to test whether the user enjoys using the product; to (6) aesthetics to explore the subjective perception of beauty; to (7) ethics to verify deontological issues related to the product; to (8) spirituality to explore the mystical or internal comfort field of the user about the product.

In a similar direction, under the domain of industrial ecology, Queiroz (2014; 2018) explains that materiality is related to the techno cycles and biocycles that surround the product, in other words, the relationship of materials with the environment, while immateriality is tied to the consumption of information. The author also addresses dematerialization, in which the product is thought to feed back its biocycle. This way, a relationship is established between the user value typologies and the (im)materiality of the product, in which efficiency and excellence act in the material dimensions of the product, while status, esteem, entertainment, aesthetics, ethics, and spirituality act in the immaterial dimension. Despite the functionality versus experience and extrinsic versus intrinsic relationship of the typology of consumer value, it is important to note that the materiality versus immateriality relationship does not apply in the same way.

Cobra (2007) approaches the marketing applied to the fashion field and comments that given the sector's complex character and its ephemeral profile, some considerations are important to define value. The author addresses the importance of analyzing the immateriality issues that involve the fashion product, centered on the user, for efficient product communication. However, he highlights the need to consider peculiarities, such as the experts that dictate trends, for example, magazine editors who are invited to validate fashion collections.

Based on this, to analyze the success or failure of a fashion product, three metrics can be considered at the materiality level, the financial performance (profitability), the technical performance (tenant acceptance), and the user perspective (sales volume), as well as one metric at the immateriality level, the user perspective (satisfaction) (COBRA, 2007).



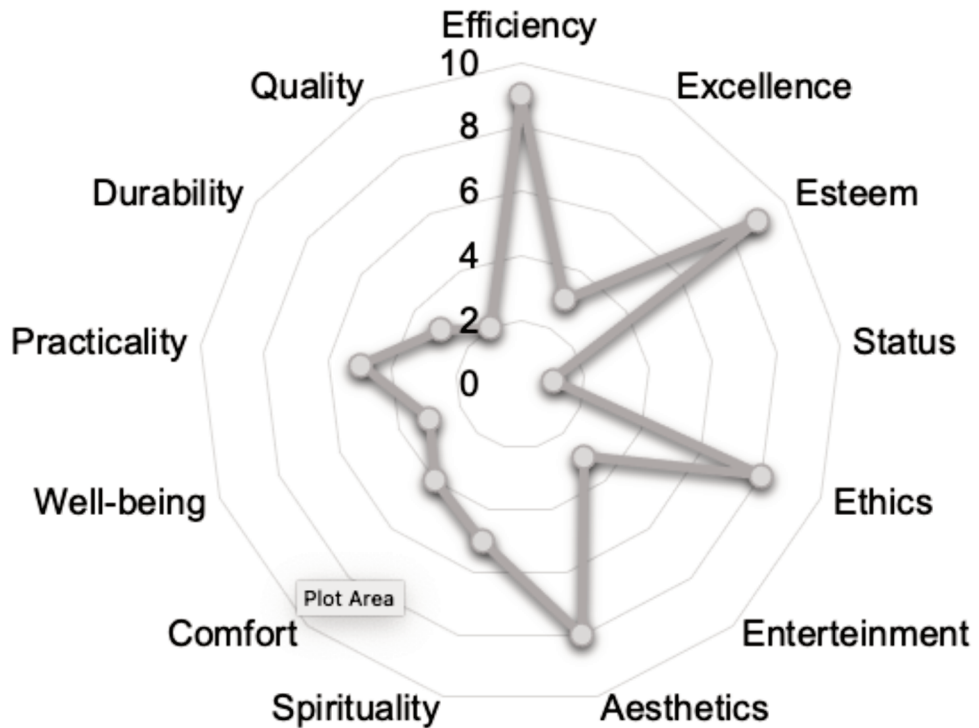
Whether in terms of satisfaction or more broadly, experience, immateriality has always been linked to the fashion product. The difference is from the twentieth century, with an increase in the levels of product value, especially concerning immateriality, characterized by impulsiveness before the desire to consume the novelty, which changes the social dynamics and makes room for the feeling of emptiness in the individual (SANT'ANNA, 2007). In this context, the user who used to be loyal to a brand starts to make use of the possibility of consuming the variety of brands that are offered (LIPOVETSKY, 1989) and acquires a more active and reflective profile regarding the product, which enhances the uniqueness (CIDREIRA, 2005).

4 RESULTS

Based on the data survey, this section presents the results of the research. To contextualize the sample of 10 (ten) companies surveyed, it is noteworthy that half of the respondents claim to be working in the process of product improvement, while the other half state to have reached product maturity. This duality is due to the fact that some of the interviewees have a lot of experience and others report having little or no experience in the sector. And those who have little experience end up outsourcing the production, which does not always have the expected quality. Another important finding is the quality of the materials for product development. The interviewees comment that, for example, organic cotton knitwear tends to yellow, if it does not receive proper maintenance, and some knitwear presents non-conformities, such as a tendency to form pilling.

In retrospect, Holbrook (1999) defines user value typologies as extrinsic or intrinsic, self-directed or guided, and active or reactive. Thus, with a list of product attributes and their respective explanations from the user value typologies, the respondents chose which attributes are valued by the user and added other items, illustrated in Figure 2. The ownership of this knowledge about the user by the interviewees lies in the direct relationship they have, whether in contact at street fairs, points of sale, or social networks.

Figure 1: Fashion designers' perception of what they deliver to the user.



Source: research data (2017).

In addition to the attributes, efficiency, excellence, esteem, status, ethics, entertainment, esthetics, and spirituality, the following items were mentioned: comfort, well-being, practicality, durability, and quality, which are aligned with the concept of efficiency, emphasizing this attribute. On the other hand, excellence, status, and entertainment, despite being mentioned by the interviewees, are dealt with superficially when it comes to the true concept of the attribute. Table 2 shows the attributes of the typology of consumer value with the percentage obtained by interviewing fashion designers.

Table 3. Typology of consumer value: fashion designers' perception of what they deliver to the user.

		EXTRINSIC	INTRINSIC
SELF-ORIENTED	<i>Active</i>	Efficiency (09)	Entertainment (03)
	<i>Reactive</i>	Excellence (03)	Aesthetics (08)
ORIENTED	<i>Active</i>	Status (01)	Ethics (08)
	<i>Reactive</i>	Esteem (09)	Spirituality (05)

Source: research data (2017).

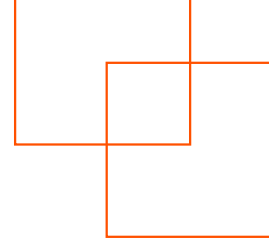
In the following subsections, the attributes are detailed in their respective dimensions of (im)materiality.

4.1 Material performance

Among the most prominent attributes of the interviewees is efficiency. Besides the number of indications among the typology of consumer value, the interviewees also openly point out comfort, well-being, practicality, durability, and quality as other attributes of the sustainable fashion product. Thus, resuming the concept of efficiency, it is possible to see an alignment between all these items.

In terms of efficiency, 09 (nine) of the respondents point to the importance of the product meeting the primary functionality of dressing the body, but with emphasis on ergonomic aspects. It is reported that the user expects a product that reflects his/her routine in terms of comfort, durability, and practicality, and this is achieved by choosing appropriate materials, modeling, and manufacturing. The following items are also part of the list of what to expect from a sustainable fashion product: to meet the diversity of bodies; to allow the versatility of a piece; to last several seasons in a user's style repertoire; to require little or no maintenance.

Excellence, chosen by 03 (three) of the interviewees, is considered a delicate concept because sustainable fashion designers consider they have little or no direct competition in the market. Therefore, as they limit themselves to see excellence through competition, instead of looking at the differentials offered by the product itself, this attribute does not comprise the sustainable fashion product.



4.2 Immaterial performance

Similarly to excellence, the concept of status, raised by 01 (one) of the interviewees, is also confusing. Status enters the list not because it is chosen, but because it has not been discarded, so there are no considerations about the attribute. Entertainment is chosen by 03 (three) of the interviewees because of specific issues such as, for example, a company that develops a poem on a T-shirt and reports the user's interaction with the product, resulting in entertainment. Thus, entertainment is not seen by all interviewees in the same way due to the particularities of each company's products.

This is followed by esteem, pointed out by 09 (nine) of the interviewees, and which brings comments about the user disregarding dysfunctional aspects of the product to detriment of the esteem in using a sustainable product, after all, the moral value for a conscious consumption is more important than the aesthetics.

However, the aesthetics, indicated by 08 (eight) of the respondents, does not disappoint. The interviewees are determined to detach the sustainable fashion product from the old recycling image, as it was approached in the theoretical referential. They seek through new materials, innovate to add value, to compete aesthetically with conventional products.

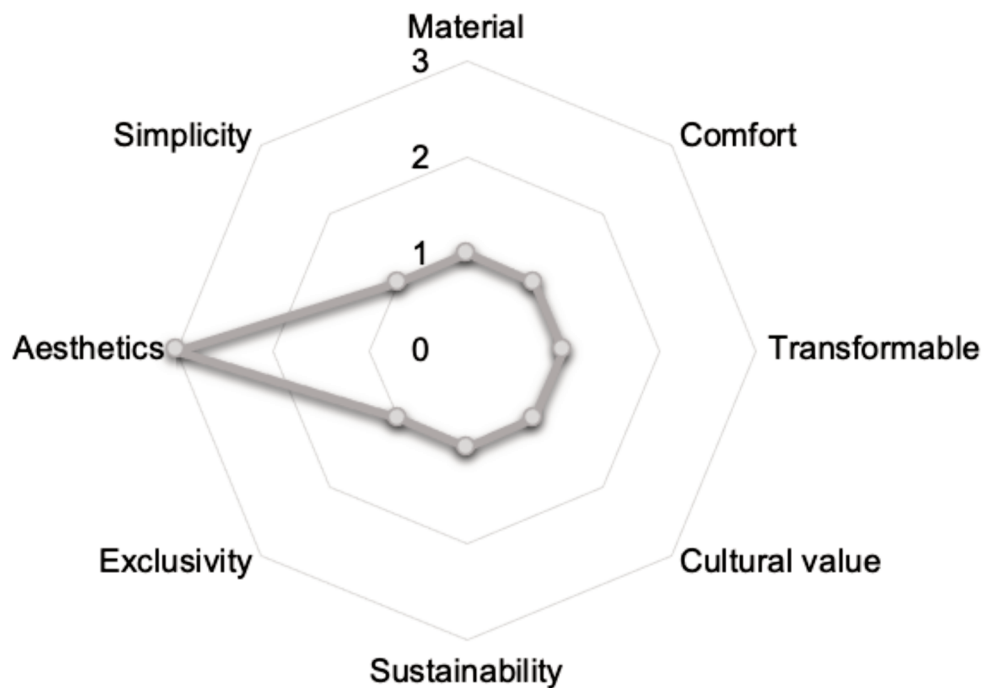
Ethics is addressed by 08 (eight) of the interviewees and they clarify that it is an essential attribute when it comes to sustainable fashion because it is the basis of the construction of environmental, social, economic, and cultural awareness about the product in its (im)materiality.

Finally, spirituality, addressed by 05 (five) of the interviewees, is considered one of the product's attributes by establishing a playful mechanism with the user, much to the validation of a conscious lifestyle as opposed to contemporary unsustainability.

4.3 Fashion product differential (sustainable)

Besides the user value typologies, the interviewees were questioned about the differential of the sustainable fashion product. In the figure below it is possible to verify the answers obtained concerning the questioning.

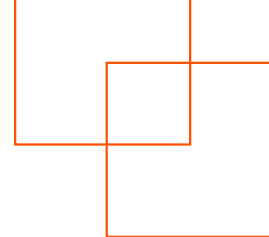
Figure . The differential of the sustainable fashion product.



Source: research data (2017).

The interviewees do not have a consensus on which attribute concentrates the differential of the sustainable fashion product, but it stands out the aesthetics among, material, comfort, transformable, cultural value, sustainability, exclusivity, and simplicity. As already mentioned, this scenario is characterized by the stigma of recycling.

In detail to the other attributes presented, the use of materials of sustainable origin provides a superior experience about products made with conventional materials; the comfort, in the physical, economic and psychological dimensions, is provided by the use of a product with refined aesthetics; the product's transformable capacity allows its use in several forms; the cultural value is defined by the



insertion of elements that build identity relations with the user; sustainability adds value for its qualities; exclusivity is offered by manual confection and few units; and simplicity through basic products, of conscious production, without brand appeal.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

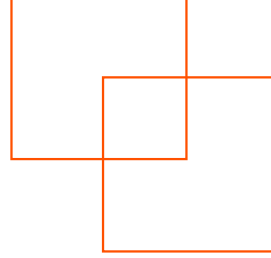
This research, aiming to analyze the (im)material performance of the sustainable fashion product from the fashion designer's perspective, addresses attributes that make up the fashion

product development process, in the dimensions of (im)materiality. Among the most important attributes presented by the research are efficiency, esteem, ethics, aesthetics, and spirituality.

Established on the frequencies of the typology of consumer value, of Holbrook (1999), it was possible to observe a pattern of the fashion designer's perception before the user of his product. In terms of functionality, the user seeks to have control over the choice of the product for his/her own consumption and adopts a passive posture towards the product in the consumption relationship for the other, respectively seeking efficiency and esteem. In terms of experience, the user adopts a passive posture in choosing the product for his/her own consumption and pursues to have dominion over the product in the consumption relationship for the other pursuing aesthetics and ethics. These facts highlight contemporary values in the user's relationship with the sustainable fashion product - characterized by ephemeral consumption, which aims to exalt uniqueness - through the consumption of an efficient product that nurtures esteem, emphasizes aesthetics, and communicates a false ethic.

Based on this consideration about the sustainable fashion product, it is chosen to use the word "sustainable" between quotes on some occasions, to raise questioning about the theory and practice of sustainable fashion. It is also considered whether the unsustainable present will not lead all business models in the same direction.

In order to do that, it is necessary to expand the concepts that involve the materiality of the fashion product, by exploring the potential that can be obtained through the communication of the



immaterial dimension attributes, intangibility, and experience. With this, beyond a simple consumption relationship, it is possible to consider the establishment of a cultural relationship through product development, which is established by the creation of collaborative networks driven by local reality, as it is already a reality in the context of the creative economy in the researched region, for example.

In this way, the fashion designer has a fundamental role in the history that fashion is yet to write, but a disruptive look at the product is urgently needed to stand out not only from aesthetics, but from moral values, which neoliberalism imposes through consumption, and to overcome barriers by dematerializing the most sustainable fashion product.

The main limitations of this research were: the definition of the regional contour, which resulted in a sectorized and small sample; and the perspective of only one side of this relationship, the fashion designer. However, the regionalization awakened particularities that may go unnoticed in research with a larger universe, and the systemic look of a micro-entrepreneur corroborates a broad and detailed understanding of the steps and players involved in the fashion production chain.

In a recommendation for future studies, it is suggested to explore, besides the (im)materiality, a possible path to the dematerialization of the sustainable fashion product as a way to a more sustainable fashion. Moreover, the realization of this research framework, with a focus on user perception, can bring new insights into a sustainable fashion product. Finally, the expansion of the research perimeter to a national or international level can bring interesting and important comparative data for the sector.

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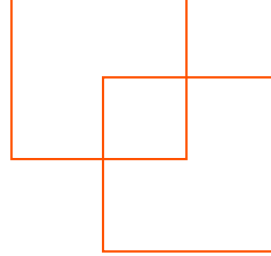
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