

THE POLITICS OF FASHION

The use and perception of political statements by fashion houses in relation to women's rights and emancipation

WE
SHOULD
ALL BE
FEMINISTS

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"For fashion is that most personal of things, our second skin, and it is the thing that binds us to our society, how we make sense of who we are and who everyone else is too" - Tim Edwards, Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices and Politics

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women’s rights and emancipation”**

ABSTRACT

Within this research it is shown that fashion should be considered as a meaningful concept that is an expression of ideas, desires or beliefs that circulate within the society (Wilson, 2013). In addition, politics and fashion are two fields that have an inseparable connection. The main goal of this research is to analyse this relation more profoundly, where the meaning of fashion is examined through the use and perception of political statements within the fashion industry. This research is placed in the political context of the presidential election process of Donald Trump within the United States. A specific political reaction that was striking in this period was linked to the feminist debates of women’s rights and emancipation. This resulted in visible political statements by different fashion houses that were subsequently perceived and given meaning by the fashion intermediaries. Through qualitative content analysis of fashion articles and qualitative interviewing of fashion editors, five fashion houses were examined on the use and perception of political statements. Through the analysis of Dior, Prabal Gurung, Prada, Versace and Missoni, it became clear that political statements could be used and perceived in different ways. From this research five relevant elements were developed that play an important role in the use and perception of political statements in fashion. Firstly there exists the difference between an obvious or intrinsic statement, secondly, the link between the statement and the entire collection, the third element is related to the extent to which the political statement is perceived as a seemingly logical next step for the fashion house, fourthly the existing of a trend mechanism regarding political statements and finally, the commercial element that is linked to the presented political statements in a collection. These elements contribute to the way in which fashion intermediaries perceive the statements and subsequently give meaning to them. From this research these elements prove to be of great relevance for a political statement in fashion to be perceived as sincere and meaningful.

KEYWORDS: *fashion, political statement, fashion intermediaries, perception, women’s rights and emancipation*

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Preface

Well, here it is: my thesis for the master programme of Arts, Culture and Society. The creation of this large project was quite challenging and has been accomplished through the help I received from many others. In this section I would like to thank some people who have been very helpful and with whom I could not have done this without.

My supervisor Janna Michael has helped me with the formulation of the ideas that were in my head but which I could not pin down. She has helped me to go into the right directions and showed me how to improve my ideas.

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Then, there is of course also my family, my mother, father and sister who have always been there for me with new ideas and thoughts, but foremost who were always interested to talk about the progress I made and moments where I got stuck. The same goes for my friends who provided a sympathetic ear when needed.

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I am really happy with the end result, and I hope you will like it as much as I do.

1. Introduction

From 2016 until now, the political realm has been subject to a lot of change (Bremmer, 2016; Dombey, 2016). One of the most influential political events during this time was the presidential election within the United States (U.S.) in 2016, where Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were presented as the Democratic and Republican nominees (Dombey, 2016). On the eighth of November of that same year, Donald Trump was elected as the fifty-fourth president of the U.S. The process of this political event has had impact on a lot of different global debates and issues such as the increase of populism, the refugee crises concerning immigration, and women's rights and emancipation (Walters, 2017; Zurcher, 2017). Especially the latter topic got a lot of international attention, regarding comments of Trump related to sexual misconduct towards women, their position within society and women's health (Siddiqui, 2018; Davis, 2017). This created an increasing tension between Trump and Hillary Clinton during the election process. As a result of the inauguration of Trump, different movements were organized such as the Women's March, Planned Parenthood and the MeToo movement (Barbaro and Twohey, 2016; Siddiqui, 2018). All these movements were created with the same aim, to raise awareness about sexual misconduct and gender equality (Siddiqui, 2018). It has been stated that the appointment of this new presidency is 'the worst we've ever seen for women' (ibid.).

One of the industries that has reacted to the presidential election of the U.S. relating to the specific debates of women's rights and emancipation is the fashion industry (Friedman, 2016; Schwarz, 2018). Already before this heated election process, feminism was relevant within fashion. Their relationship has been both conflicting and harmonious (Wilson, 2003). On the one hand, fashion was perceived as the conservation of the 'male gaze' regarding the objectification of the female body and femininity, while on the other hand fashion was identified as a tool for women empowerment and the embracement of femininity (Mulvey, 1975; Groeneveld, 2009). The use of political statements related to feminism and the accompanying topics of women's rights and emancipation, were remarkably visible within the fashion industry the past two years. It seems there has been occurring a shift in this time within the fashion world where the political atmosphere has impacted the designers and their creations, which became highly visible on the runways (Schwartz, 2018). It becomes increasingly visible that fashion labels are consciously using politics within their designs, using the clothes to display a certain political vision or message regarding women's rights and emancipation (Landers, 2017; Lang, 2017).

It is scientifically relevant to find out more about this link between politics and fashion due to the notion that within the academic world the field of fashion remains a fairly

underexposed research topic (Crane and Bovone, 2006; Edwards, 2011). The main focus within research has been on fashion related to specific historical times or political structures of specific countries. What however remains underexposed is the underlying meaning behind fashion in relation to its political context. As Edwards (2011) states in his research: “Given the enormities of ongoing archival efforts into the study of fashion we may well know with some, if not total, accuracy who wore what where and when, yet we have far less understanding of what it [*i.e.* fashion] means” (Edwards, 2011: 5). Within this research I will therefore specifically focus on the examination of the meaning of fashion related to the politics of fashion, through the use and perception of political statements.

A societal relevance of this research relates to the critical politically loaded messages the fashion houses are portraying and the wider impact this could eventually have through the perception of these statements by fashion intermediaries (Binkley, 2017; Lang, 2017). Beside the notion that fashion houses have a certain vision or message they want to portray through their collections, fashion intermediaries give actual meaning to the decoding of these messages (Aspers and Skov, 2006). Fashion intermediaries such as fashion journalists and the output they provide through magazines, define what is seen as fashion and present this perception to the wider public (idem: 804). Considering the fact that the main focus of this research is about the symbolic meaning that exists within political statements in fashion, the fashion intermediaries will be the central actors within this research. How do these intermediaries construct their perception of these political statements? And in what way do they subsequently give meaning to these portrayed statements regarding women’s rights and emancipation? This leads to the following relevant research question: *“In what ways did fashion editors perceive the use of political statements by fashion houses regarding women's rights and emancipation during and after the election process of president Donald Trump?”*

To answer this question a theoretical framework will be presented in chapter two in which relevant theories and concepts related to fashion and politics will be examined. I will start with the history of fashion as a field of study and how it has changed over time. Subsequently, the concept of fashion will be presented where I will highlight the importance of the meaning of fashion. Hereafter definitions for fashion houses as cultural producers and fashion editors and magazines as cultural intermediaries will be given. Then, a conceptualization of the concepts of politics and political statements related to the fashion industry will be presented. After the relevant conceptualizations the relation between fashion and its context will be examined, where the highly relevant relation with the political context will be illustrated. Finally, the connection between fashion and feminism will be illustrated. After the theoretical framework is presented, chapter three presents an overview of the used

research methods, where also the implications of the chosen methodology will be discussed. Within this research a case study method has been chosen, in order to discover underlying meanings of the studied phenomenon. Five different fashion houses will serve as these cases, which are the following: Dior, Prabal Gurung, Prada, Versace and Missoni. This research has a qualitative base carried out by the use of interviews and a qualitative content analysis, the former through experts, i.e. fashion editors, within the fashion industry and the latter regarding fashion articles within magazines and newspapers and collection statements of the specific examined collections. Following the justification of the made methodological choices, the analysis will be presented in chapter four. Here I will firstly present a contextualisation of the political climate through the illustration of the election process of Trump regarding debates around women's rights and emancipation. Hereafter, the relation between fashion and political statements within this specific political context will be explored through the eyes of the fashion intermediaries. Then, a contextualisation of the general political reactions of the fashion world will be demonstrated. Subsequently, the different cases will be introduced where the analysis of the use and perception of political statements of women's rights and emancipation regarding each fashion house will be presented. Consequently, I will discuss the findings of the analysis where I demonstrate that the use and perception of political statements within fashion are established through five different elements: the difference between an obvious or intrinsic statement, the link between the statement and the entire collection, the extent to which the political statement is perceived as a logical next step for the fashion house, the trend mechanism regarding political statements and finally, the commercial element. Finally a conclusion will be presented, where the research question will be answered by the five identified elements that derived from the analysis. Furthermore I will reflect on the findings and provide suggestions for future research.

2. The politics of fashion: a theoretical framework

In order to answer the formulated research question, I will first present a theoretical overview of the existing literature relating to the topic of the politics of fashion. First I will present an overview of the development of fashion as a field of study, where after a conceptualization of fashion is provided where I will focus on the meaning that lies within this concept. Subsequently the relevant actors in this research, the fashion houses and the fashion editors, will be conceptualized as cultural producers and intermediaries. Hereafter, the concepts of politics and the political statement will be clarified and related to the field of fashion. The relation between fashion and its context will be presented, where a specific focus will be on the political context. Here it will become clear that fashion is inseparably linked to the political context wherein it exists. In addition, the connection between fashion and feminism will be illustrated, where it is shown that this relation is twofold.

2.1 The history of fashion as a field of study

The field of fashion has been treated in several ways within the academic world. The topic of fashion has been suffering from an image problem within the academic field, where it was not considered as a valuable and intellectual topic to use for research purposes (Edwards, 2011: 1). This caused that for a long period fashion was an underexposed research field (Tseëlon, 2001; Crane and Bovone, 2006). With this comes the notion that the existing research within the field of fashion related to cultural and social phenomena is mostly theoretical and/or historical, and often lacks empirical arguments. Tseëlon (2001) argues that because of the specific focus on historical research the meaning behind the structures and processes of fashion are being underexposed (Tseëlon, 2001: 436). However, since a few decades fashion has become a subject of study in cultural and sociological researches as well (Edwards, 2011). Therefore, fashion became acknowledged as a subject related to social change, technological development and cultural identity (Breward, 2007: 675). This causes that the focus of study within the field of fashion is now context-related rather than object-centred (Breward, 2007: 674).

2.2 The meaning of fashion

Godart and Mears (2009) state that the fashion industry belongs within the creative economy, related to the aspect that it creates goods that are mostly about meaning over functionality (Godart and Mears, 2009: 672). In relation to this, Paulicelli (2015) considers fashion to be a “embodied experience that is culturally, socially and historically situated” (Paulicelli, 2015: 2). Entwistle (2015) notes that literature on the realm of dress and body has been ignored by the

literature on fashion, and vice versa. Therefore she argues that a perspective on the interrelation between fashion and dress is needed when defining fashion. Here she notes that the concept of fashion can be perceived as a meaning of a system of dress within western modernity. Entwistle defines dress as a more general term that describes all manners in which people use things to modify their body (Entwistle, 2015: 45). This is in line with the idea of Wilson (2003) who describes fashion as the following: “fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles: fashion in a sense is change” (idem: 3). The concept of change related to fashion is also maintained by Köppchen (2014). She argues that the fashion system can be seen as a system led by continuous change, which result in the production of garments.

When defining the concept of fashion, Breward (2007) presents it as a creative and contemporary phenomenon. Lipovetsky (1994) agrees with this vision. He argues that fashion should be considered as a meaningful concept, related to its context. Instead of only being perceived as a reflection of social position and rank, fashion should be considered having an intrinsic explanatory power. He furthermore puts emphasis on the potential of fashion being a liberating and democratizing force (idem: 131). He makes this assumption through the combination of the multiple aspects within fashion where the focus is not solely on fashion as a material end product, but foremost on the process and principles that underlie the fashion system. In addition to this, Wilson (2003) argues that fashion produces discourses and aesthetic ideas around certain collections of clothing (Wilson, 2003: 7). With linking the concept of discourse to fashion, a sense of meaning is created. Wilson explores this concept further through the examination of dress and fashion as a symbolic system where the expression of ideas, desires or beliefs that circulate within the society are expressed (idem: 9). This will be the maintained definition of fashion within this research because it matches with the way fashion is being examined in this research, as a concept that carries symbolic meaning through the expression of ideas related to society.

The aspect of symbolic meanings within fashion is also used by Kawamura (2005), in order to distinguish the concept of fashion from clothing. She argues that clothing is a material product and linked to a manufacturing process, whereas fashion is a symbolic product that creates ideas and beliefs (Kawamura, 2005: 52). Fashion can therefore be identified as an embodiment of symbolic values (Crane and Bovone, 2006: 320). Through this, fashion can even be seen as a vehicle for socialisation and liberation from cultural constraints (ibid.). This process of creating symbolic values is closely linked to the will to satisfy the target audience. To achieve this, fashion houses are searching for the ‘right’ values and symbolic meanings to intertwine in their collections. The identification of these

symbolic values takes shape through new values that are emerging or are in the process of change within the society (Crane and Bovone, 2006: 322). This process is mainly linked to the culture and politics of the country where the items are designed (idem: 324). However, an important factor to take into consideration is the influence of globalisation that reduces the differences between national fashion systems (idem: 330).

The meaning of fashion and the way in which fashion houses portray their ideas through their collections can be understood by the theory of Hall (2006) related to coding and decoding within the field of media studies. Although he mainly focuses on discursive relations, in a way he also links this to visual products. He states that a cultural object is a form of communication, which becomes visible “through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of a discourse” (Hall, 2006: 163). The product consists of its meanings and social production relations and it is within these structures that the product is being distributed to the audience. Leitch (1996) adds to this that clothing constantly undergoes coding and decoding in processes of social interaction and judgment (Leitch, 1996: 122). This process of decoding of meanings and messages in fashion is linked to the fashion intermediaries, who are the main actors within this research.

2.3 Cultural producers and intermediaries

Within this section, a conceptualisation of the fashion houses and fashion editors will be presented. Godart and Mears (2009) argue that within the fashion industry the fashion houses can be identified as cultural producers (Godart and Mears, 2009: 671). The cultural producers are identified as the creators of the industry (Molloy and Larner, 2010: 374). The goal of these cultural producers is to communicate different symbolic meanings through the production of cultural goods, i.e. clothing, which are becoming visible through advertising but mostly on the catwalk (Crane, 2000). The more known fashion houses within the industry, such as the fashion houses that will be analysed within this research, are identified as high-status cultural producers (Aspers and Skov, 2006: 804). Fashion houses display their collections twice a year during Fashion Week season, situated in one of the specific fashion capitals of New York, London, Milan or Paris (Godart and Mears, 2009: 672). According to Godart and Mears, the cultural producers create items driven by creativity and aesthetic preferences. Choices within the designing process are made collectively and are socially responsive to the context and social structures they are made in (idem: 673). However, the researchers state that it remains mostly unclear how exactly those social relations influence the creative production process (idem: 674). Within the conceptualisation of fashion houses as cultural producers, a distinction can be made between brands within high fashion and

commercial fashion. Mears (2011) argues that high fashion represents an idealised world, where the objects, i.e. the clothes, are linked to symbolic meanings and to some extent have a degree of unattainability. This category of fashion is often linked to the elite status. On the other hand there exists commercial fashion, where the clothes are designed purely for commercial purposes. Within this part of fashion there exist no to little social distance with the audience, in order to be as matching as possible with the wishes of the consumer.

The cultural intermediaries play an important role within the fashion industry as well. While Bourdieu (1984) defined cultural intermediaries as “the producers of cultural programmes on television, radio, or the critics of quality newspapers and magazines” (idem: 323), Entwistle (2006) argues that the scope of intermediaries has broadened within the field of fashion to advertising, women's and men's magazines, and other fields that produce and promote fashion (idem: 708). Aspers and Skov (2006) illustrate that the intermediaries within the fashion industry, such as fashion journalists, also create and give meaning to the concept fashion. Due to their important place within the industry and regarding the high status they often endow, magazines define and construct what is seen as fashion (idem: 804). The editors at fashion magazines therefore make an important contribution to the construction of fashion. Aspers and Skov argue that fashion intermediaries are not solely reproducing what high-end fashion houses have been producing, but rather conceptualise and interpret the ways the created collections can be perceived (idem: 805). Moreover, Skov (2014) makes an important addition to this theory, related to the commercial aspect of fashion. According to Skov, fashion intermediaries are also the actors who make the connection between the producer and the consumer within the fashion industry. Besides interpreting the meaning of fashion, they transform the collections into commercial items through their position as intermediaries (idem: 121). However, Molloy and Larner (2010) suggest that the concept of cultural intermediaries is being challenged. Specifically within the fashion industry, the authors claim that fashion intermediaries are becoming increasingly important within the creation of fashion in relation to the traditional cultural producers (idem: 374). According to the researchers, the boundary between cultural producers and cultural intermediaries is becoming less visible.

2.4 Politics and the political statement

Within this research, the connection between the concepts of fashion and politics will be further examined. In this study a broad definition of politics related to culture will be maintained as presented by Van der Eijk (2001). He makes a division between the aspect approach and the domain approach within politics. For this research the former approach will

be used which states that “politics is always a part of the aspects of human relationships and interactions in all kinds of life spheres” (Van der Eijk, 2001: 4). This definition implies that the concept of politics is, besides only within the traditional political sphere of governments and political institutions, also present in all other organisations and environments. This makes it possible to analyse the way in which politics manifest themselves within the fashion industry. In this way, the political reactions of the fashion world in relation to the presidential election process in the U.S. can be examined.

Another important concept for this research related to politics is the political statement. According to Bailey (1969), political statements can be seen as “messages which are intended to elicit a cooperative response from the receiver” (Bailey, 1969: 2). Bailey argues furthermore that these statements can be used with a variety of purposes. One of them is to provoke personal reflection within the audience in relation to a certain (political) event. Here the audience is intended to use the political statement as a frame to look at a certain political event and personally reflect on it (ibid.). Important is the relation between the message and the context in which the statement is presented for the audience to give meaning to it. In this specific research the audience takes form in the individuals attending a fashion show, specifically the fashion journalists of different fashion magazines. They are the ones that are the receiver of the presented messages by the fashion houses and subsequently give meaning to it. The way in which a political statement is given meaning and perceived, is illustrated by Johnson and Judd (1983). They state that the perception of political statements is strongly linked to the correspondence of the topic of the statement with the ideas and position of the perceiver. A political statement has the biggest impact when it corresponds with the beliefs of the perceiver, or when the statement deviates in an extreme way with the beliefs of the perceiver. This makes that nuance in a political statement is hardly noticed (Johnson and Judd, 1983: 993). When translated to the position of the fashion intermediaries, as soon as a political statement matches with their beliefs or goes extremely against their vision, the political statement is more likely to be noticed and remembered, and therefore has a bigger impact.

Politically loaded reactions in relation to the debates around women’s rights during the election process in the United States became visible in multiple collections on the runway of different fashion houses (Schwartz, 2018; Landers, 2017; Lang, 2017). These political reactions can be considered as political statements through the use of the aspect approach of political manifestations as stated by Van der Eijk (2001) and can be identified as messages that frame a certain political event in order to provoke reflection from the receiver, as stated by Bailey (1969).

2.5 Fashion and its context

In regard to the idea that fashion is a subject related to social context and change, Morgado (2014) states that the current fashion industry and its related phenomena are a reflection of postmodern processes. This is in line with the argument presented by Paulicelli (2015). In her article she argues that fashion should be considered as a social institution of modernity (Paulicelli, 2015: 3). These specific postmodern visions on fashion imply that the concept of fashion is related to and formed by its context. A theory that is linked to this same vision comes from Bourriaud (2002). In his book *Relational Aesthetics* he states that in continuation on the concept of postmodernity art is intrinsically linked to social context (Bourriaud, 2002: 15). He furthermore explains that the concept of relational aesthetics is linked to cultural objects that are produced in connection to a social context, where artwork is used to create a reciprocal dialogue with a broader, contextual meaning. When talking about social context, Bourriaud also makes a specific connection to the political sphere. He states that there exists a link between art and the political context, where he argues that “contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue” (Bourriaud, 2002: 17).

Although Bourriaud relates his study to the wider sphere of all art forms, Morgado (2014) draws the parallel from Bourriaud’s theory to the field of fashion. She states that the production process of fashion is shaped by the societal and cultural context, in which fashion is situated. Berry (2012) agrees with the vision of Morgado. Within the context of Bourriaud’s vision, Berry argues that a similar argument can be made for fashion as a relational object in the sense that: “The wearer’s interaction with a garment provokes social response and recognition” (Berry, 2012: 52). In developing his argument Berry draws on the relationship between fashion as a process of collective activity and social identity. The identification of fashion as a process of social identities and collective activities is also maintained by Czarniawska (2008), who argues that fashion is inseparably linked to this social process and should therefore always be analysed in this way. According to the researcher it is of great importance to understand not just the outcome of fashion from this process, but foremost how something has become fashion related to context, place and time (Czarniawska, 2008: 103). Furthermore Paulicelli (2002) examined fashion as a concept that is intertwined within all cultural and political contexts and that is has been shaped by changes in these contexts (Paulicelli, 2002: 546). In relation to this, Berry (2012) states that throughout history there have been several designers whose work was connected to these social processes, which caused that the fashion items became a reflection of social and political concerns (idem: 50). Examples Berry gives are fashion houses such as Alexander McQueen and Martin Margiela,

who captured the changing social tendencies within unconventional designs and controversial portrayals of their collections (ibid.).

Not only does the context include important attributes for the wearer of fashion, but also for the perceiver (Karunaratne 2016). This shows that fashion is given meaning through the way it is perceived within its context. Due to the identification of clothes as social objects, meanings within them are generated through different social and cultural contexts (idem: 43). Karunaratne (2016) argues furthermore that there are three kinds of context that can influence the meaning of fashion: the appearance context, the social context, and the historical context (idem: 36). This is in relation to the idea of Morgado, who argues that fashion in itself always presents a certain meaningful vision, related to political, societal or cultural events (Morgado, 2014: 318).

2.6 The politics of fashion

In her article Paulicelli (2015) sheds light on the relation between the historical contexts and fashion in regard to politics. She argues that the social and political domains are connected to the development of fashion (Paulicelli, 2015: 2). Furthermore she generally states that fashion has a visual power related to the dynamics happening in the political society (idem: 5). Navarro-Delgado (2018) states that both concepts of dress and fashion are inseparably linked to the political context. This indicates that fashion always has a certain political dimension to it, which can result in a certain political impact. The researcher furthermore states that when fashion challenges the status quo, it spontaneously contains political meaning.

In regard to the concept of power, Karunaratne (2014) examines the link between fashion and political power. Karunaratne argues that fashion is one of the ways to understand the nature of politics with its connections and implications for changes in social power relations (Karunaratne, 2014: 709). The researcher states that this becomes clear due to the mutual dependency and reciprocal influence the two fields have on each other. In line with Bourriaud, Paulicelli and Karunaratne, Leitch states that fashion is inseparably linked to the concept of politics: "Fashion is not free from intricate political entanglements at all moments and levels" (Leitch, 1996: 118). He argues that the politics of fashion are displayed potentially everywhere in visual culture. Leitch points out that the politics of dress is reflected in both the local and global arena where he makes a division between micro- and macro politics (Leitch, 1996: 121). In relation to this, Leitch argues that a political message within fashion is most powerful perceived when presented on a global level, because of the large reach the message has within all levels of society (idem: 125). This is in line with the specific

political context of this research, which occurs within the U.S. but has an influence within the global political realm as well (The Guardian, 2016). The political context of the election process within the United States in regard to the debates around women's rights and emancipation will be illustrated within contextualization part of the analysis in chapter four.

The visibility of politics through fashion is shown in an article by Cugini (2016). Cugini draws on interviews with researcher Paulicelli, stating that the visibility of political statements within the fashion industry becomes increasingly clear. Paulicelli gives the example of New York Fashion Week where in some shows the creations almost became a tool for displaying political messages and visions. Navarro-Delgado (2018) agrees with this, stating that over the two last years fashion shows have become increasingly political. However, Paulicelli also sheds light on the thought that it is difficult to find out whether this vision is truly the inspiration behind the collection. This is related to the idea that the use of a strong political message behind a fashion collection can sometimes be seen as an obligated marketing strategy (Cugini, 2016). Especially regarding the number of collections that presented political statements over the last year, Navarro-Delgado even talks of it becoming a trend. In any case, it becomes clear that politics tend to play a key role within fashion.

2.7 Fashion and feminism

The intersection of feminism and fashion is the topic of many feminist studies. Within feminist theory different ideas exist towards gender inequality within society, which is manifested in different 'waves' of feminism (Tyner and Ogle, 2009). The second and third waves are relevant for this study.

From the 1960's on, the second wave of feminism was concerned with the role of women within the cultural context of the ruling patriarchy. A central notion in this wave is the idea that the 'personal is political', which relates to the thought that a personal issue is also political because of gender inequality within a patriarchal system (Hanisch, 1969: 114). This wave is also connected to the way the female body was the focus point for cultural constructions of the female identity (Wolf, 1991: 98). Here, a very important element was the critique on femininity (Edwards, 2011: 68). The main tendency related to this notion is that men objectify the female body with oppressive ideals of femininity and female beauty (Mulvey 1975). Mulvey (1975) examined this notion within the field of cinema, where she furthermore argued that within this 'male gaze', men also sexually objectify women (idem: 19). In relation to this, Groeneveld (2009) states that the ideas within the second wave have also been memorialised as a statement against fashion (idem: 181). Here, the idea existed that fashion

constraints women of being free, sometimes literally, by the imposing of fashion items like high-heels, tight skirts or bras (ibid.; Edwards, 2011: 68).

However, not all feminist theories agree with this vision. This becomes visible in the third wave of feminism that highlights the embracing of individualism and personality (Groeneveld, 2009), with a focus on 'girl power' as a way of independence (Edwards, 2011: 71). In relation to this third wave, Scott (1993) argues that the fashion industry has provided women to take control of their bodies and femininity, which results in the opportunity for women to express individuality and achieve empowerment. Within this, she makes a division within the feminist theory, stating that women can also be feminist when caring about their appearance (idem: 321). With this comes the possibility that women can use the feeling of sexiness to obtain social and psychological empowerment (Tyner and Ogle: 2009: 109). Here, women are empowered to reject social restrictions on the expression of female sexuality (idem: 111). However, there exists also a group within feminist theory that suggests that this harms the women's psychological health and that this power is misguided (Bordo, 2003). This thought is strongly related to the current prevailing beauty standards of being white, skin and young which are factors that women cannot determine or choose (Tyner and Ogle, 2009: 109).

Overall, fashion in relation to feminism can have two forms: subjecting or empowering (Wilson, 2003). Fashion is then either identified as a tool for oppression or expression (Edwards, 2011: 70). This division of the feminist view on fashion is related to the perception of women within fashion as either victims or as warriors (Edwards, 2011: 67).

From this literature study it became clear that the political meaning of fashion should be examined. But how exactly does the political context relate to the fashion industry as a platform to present certain opinions and political messages? This development is becoming increasingly visible during collection presentations of fashion houses where political ideas and messages are presented to the audience, within the political context of the election process within the United States and the eventual election of Donald Trump regarding women's rights and emancipation. In relation to this, the examination of the relation between fashion and feminism illustrated that feminist theory either identifies fashion as a tool for subjection or empowerment of women. What remains unexamined however is the question how the political visions of the fashion houses relating women's rights, emancipation and feminism are used within collections and subsequently perceived and what further meaning is given to them. To answer this, a relevant research question, as earlier presented in the introduction, proves therefore to be the following: *"In what ways did fashion editors perceive*

the use of political statements by fashion houses regarding women's rights and emancipation during and after the election process of president Donald Trump?"

3. Methodology

The theoretical overview has shown which concepts are relevant in order to be able to answer the research question. Because the meaning and the role of these theories and concepts have been clarified, the used research strategies to analyse these concepts can now be discussed. As the author of this research, I am aware of the fact that the researcher as an individual has a great influence on the use and analysis of concepts through his or her personal position and orientation. As stated by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), it is of great importance that researchers recognise and acknowledge the reflexive character of social research, and with this the existential fact that every researcher is unavoidably part of the social phenomenon that is studied (idem: 14). A research can therefore never fully result in 'neutral' knowledge (Celis et al., 2013: 1). It is however attempted to achieve this goal as well as possible. This has been pursued by the avoidance of personal values, opinions or theoretical expectations to influence the execution of the data collection and analysis, and the findings that result from it.

Within this research a qualitative research approach is maintained, with an inductive approach of scientific reasoning and an emphasis on generating theory (Bryman, 2012: 35). The use of a qualitative analysis results in a deeper comprehension of the studied social phenomena (Silverman, 2001: 32). This qualitative research is carried out by the use of interviews and a qualitative content analysis. The former method is executed through the interviewing of professionals within the field of fashion, the fashion journalists. In this research the term journalists and editors will be used interchangeably. Taking into consideration that all fashion intermediaries are working for a fashion magazine at different positions, the term fashion editor covers the profession of journalism with other responsibilities within the magazine as well. The method of content analysis has been carried out through the use of fashion articles within fashion magazines and fashion sections of newspapers. Within this qualitative research the focus lies on one or a small number of cases, where intensive interviews and depth content analysis are used in order to create a complete overview of an event or case (King, 1996: 4). Within this research the qualitative analysis is conducted by the use of a general case study, divided into several small cases that will be intensively examined and analysed in order to understand the studied phenomenon. This research design has been chosen because a case can give valuable and deep insights into social phenomena (Yin, 1994: 2), which in this research is the emerging of political statements regarding women's rights and emancipation in the fashion industry within the election process of Donald Trump.

To analyse in what way the different fashion houses are using political statements related to women's rights and subsequently the way these statements are perceived by the fashion editors, a thematic analysis has been executed. This method of analysis entails the examination of relevant themes that are related to the research focus and question (Bryman, 2012: 580). In addition, thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998: 5). As is stated by Boyatzis (1998): "A theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organises possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (idem: 4). Within this process of describing and interpreting observations regarding the studied topic, relevant segments are assigned different codes which can be translated into different themes. These themes connect the different segments of ideas and experiences within the analysed data, which become meaningful when viewed collectively (Leininger, 1985: 60). Hereafter, certain recurring patterns are discovered, which makes it possible to compare and analyse the findings. The recognition of the relevant patterns is identified while analysing the data in relation to the research question. This enables the researcher to analyse the findings in a systematic and accurate way (Boyatzis, 1998: 5). Furthermore, the use of a thematic analyse enables the researcher to communicate the findings to other fields of study where different methods are used. The possibility to transfer the meaning of the findings increases the understanding of the studied phenomenon (ibid.). The themes are subsequently connected to the relevant literature that has been studied in order to build a valid argument within the analysis. In this way, the literature is interwoven with the findings of the research (Aronson, 1995: 2). The themes that were constructed for this research were generated inductively from the gathered data of both methods. In this research I have analysed of the use of political statements by fashion producers, i.e. the fashion houses, and how these messages and statements are perceived and given sense by fashion intermediaries, i.e. the fashion editors.

Within this methodology section I will elaborate further on the case selection process with an argumentation of the specific choices I made. Hereafter I will focus on the data collection process, which is divided into the collection of information for the content analysis and the qualitative interviews. Subsequently I will elaborate on the process of the data analysis, also through focussing on these two different methods. Finally I will highlight the positive and negative implications of the chosen methodology for this research.

3.1 Case selection

Within the separate cases, particular fashion houses will be analysed in relation to their use of political statements in certain collections, and subsequently the perception on these

statements of the fashion editors. The chosen cases are the following: Dior, Prabal Gurung, Prada, Versace, and Missoni. The different cases are selected within the context of the global fashion industry through the use of purposive sampling. This sampling method selects the different units of analysis on the basis of certain criteria to make sure they are applicable to the research question (Bryman, 2012: 418). These different cases can then give more insights into the studied subject, in order to give a more complete answer to the research question (idem: 422). Within the method of purposive sampling, I have made use of the approach of the typical case sampling method, which provides cases that exemplify and represent the studied phenomenon (idem: 419; Teddlie and Yu, 2007: 81). The different cases also have been sampled by their homogeneousness, because all the different cases have the similar characteristics as the research question; I have solely chosen fashion houses that use some kind of political statement related to women's rights and/or emancipation in their collection. Here, the goal is to describe a shared perception and behaviour among a relatively homogeneous group, where it becomes possible to examine the specific characteristics of the cases in detail (Guest et al., 2006: 76).

The selection criteria for the cases maintained within this research consist of two points: firstly, the fashion houses need to have an influential reputation within the fashion world, and secondly, the fashion labels need to have had a visible reaction within a collection in regard to women's rights and/or emancipation within the years of 2016 or 2017. The influential fashion houses are linked to the concept of high-status cultural producers, which indicates that the fashion houses display their collections during Fashion Week season. This is an important factor within this research because in this way the visibility of the collection is guaranteed within the fashion industry. This means that fashion intermediaries have knowledge of the presented collections that are examined in this research, and can therefore construct a perception on it. Furthermore, in the theoretical framework it was stated that high fashion represents symbolic meanings within the presented collections. It is exactly this meaning related to the use and perception of political statements that is pursued to examine within this research. This makes influential high fashion houses the most relevant for this research.

The visible portrayal of a political statement by a fashion house has been chosen as an important criterion in order to make sure that the analysed collections are, on the one hand, portrayed as a political message related to women's rights by the fashion house itself, and on the other hand are generally perceived as a political statement regarding these same topics by the fashion industry. The chosen time range of the chosen collections is linked to the period when the election process and the election itself within the U.S. took place, and

thus the debates around women's rights as well. The former criteria has been measured by examining whether the fashion house in question is a structural part of Fashion Week, where the latter criteria has been measured through the coverage within influential fashion magazines related to the political engagement in the specific collections. The fashion houses Dior, Prada and Versace are part of Fashion Week, are listed as the world's most influential luxury fashion brands in the year of 2017, and have proven to be politically engaged regarding women's rights and emancipation in their past collections (Grant, 2017; Fisher, 2017; Friedman, 2017; Cartner-Morley, 2017). The fashion houses Missoni and Prabal Gurung are also part of Fashion Week for many years, are however less influential in comparison to the other houses, but have very visually used political statements within their collections as well (Torgerson, 2017; Friedman, 2017; Phelps, 2017).

For these cases, I have selected one specific collection of each fashion house where a political statement regarding women's rights or emancipation is used according to fashion magazines and/or the label itself. This resulted in the Autumn/Winter 2017 collection of all the fashion houses, except for Dior where I have chosen the Spring 2017 collection. All these collections were designed and created during the presidential election process within the United States, surrounded by the debates and discussions about women's rights and emancipation. All fashion houses have presented their specific collection after Trump was inaugurated as president, except for Dior, which has presented the collection during the presidential election process. In any case, all these collections were created within the political context of the increasing importance and attention that was given to issues around women's rights and emancipation.

3.2 Data Collection

In order to answer the research question in what ways fashion editors perceived the use of political statements by fashion houses regarding women's rights and emancipation, relevant data was gathered in two ways: on the one hand through the conducting of interviews and on the other hand by the use of relevant documents. The choice for triangulation has been made in order to gain a more complete view on the studied topic. The use of different methods contributes to different insights into the understanding of studied phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998: 5). The collected articles provide a general view on the use and perception of political statements regarding the fashion houses in question, whereas the interviews provide a better understanding of the perception of the fashion editors. Here, more detailed knowledge is provided regarding the cases and the connection between politics and fashion in general. Furthermore, the method of triangulation results in more valid findings because the studied

phenomenon is analysed by two different methods (Bryman, 2012: 392). This leads to an increased understanding of the complexity of the studied social phenomenon (Malterud, 2001: 484). Both the data of the interviews and the documents has been collected through the purposive sampling method. This sampling method implies that the researched units are directly related to the research question (Bryman, 2012: 416). For this research, documents were studied and interviews were conducted with those that could provide information about the use and perception of political statements of women's rights related to the specific cases. Firstly, interviews were conducted with fashion intermediaries, specifically fashion journalists, who occupy a professional position within the fashion industry by working for a fashion magazine. Secondly, data consisting of relevant content in fashion magazines related to the studied topic has been collected. In the following section I will elaborate on the methodological choices of the data collection regarding the two methods of content analysis and qualitative interviewing.

3.2.1 Qualitative content collection

Fashion articles from different fashion magazines and fashion sections of newspapers were analysed in order to discover relevant information for this research. Media content in general is highly relevant in relation to the framing of a certain public issue (Warner, 2013). Through this, a certain powerful meaning can be created which indicates the way this issue is perceived in general (ibid.). The articles were selected in regard to their relevancy related to the research question. Within the selected articles the issue of women's rights and emancipation was examined in relation to the specific fashion houses that were chosen as cases. Initially it was planned to collect the articles through the online newspaper database LexisNexis, due to its professional authority on international newspaper- and magazine content (LexisNexis, 2018). However, it turned out that online fashion related articles are not fully and structurally being taken into account. This caused that the majority of the articles from fashion magazines online would not turn up through the database, although they could have been highly relevant. Due to this, the choice was made to search for relevant articles through Google, using the keywords of 'fashion', 'political' or 'politics' and 'women's rights' and 'feminism'. This resulted in several articles related to the different fashion houses and their use of political statements in the specific chosen collection regarding the topic of women's rights and emancipation.

With the use of fashion magazines and fashion sections of newspapers, the collections of the fashion houses can be analysed through the vision of fashion professionals and with this portrays how the collection is perceived as political. Attention has been given to

the diversity in sources of these articles, to make sure objectivity is pursued. With this the aim was to use principally well-established magazines and newspapers within the fashion industry, in order to obtain a professional view on the use and perception of the political statements. The sources that are used for this content analysis contain fashion magazines such as Vogue, Elle, Harpers Bazaar, Glamour, Women's Wear Daily and The Business of Fashion and style sections of newspapers such as The New York Times, The Guardian and Time Magazine. The fashion magazines are from different countries that produce publications written in English. The released statements by the fashion houses within these articles will give an indication of how the houses portray a certain collection in regard to a political message, and what the intention of the collection was. Per fashion house six articles have been collected and analysed, which results in the total amount of thirty articles. The specific analysed articles can be found in the appendix of this research.

3.2.2 Interviews

The choice has been made to interview fashion journalists from different relevant fashion magazines, as these fashion editors give a relevant meaning to fashion and therefore can be considered as experts within the field (Aspers and Skov, 2006: 804). With this comes the highly relevant element that fashion journalists conceptualise and interpret the ways certain collections are collectively perceived (ibid.). This makes them the most relevant candidates to give more insights into the underlying meaning of these fashion houses that produce collections that have a certain political message, and helps us to understand these events within the fashion world in a wider perspective.

In total six fashion editors have been interviewed for this research, which all can be identified as professional authorities within the fashion industry. The occupations of the interviewees are manifested in different positions within the magazines they work for, and vary from fashion editor to deputy editor. The interviewees were all female and between the age range of 25 and 40 with backgrounds in culture and/or fashion studies. The editors are working for several influential fashion magazines such as Vogue, Glamour, Elle, Harpers Bazaar and the style section of the Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant. All the magazines are located in the Netherlands, due to the realistic accessibility of these individuals in order to be able to conduct interviews with professionals from within the field. When selecting the interviewees, personal contact was made with the persons in question, related to their professional editorial occupation within the specific fashion magazine. Some of the persons that were contacted I knew due to previous working experience. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, due to the fact that all interviewees are Dutch, as am I. The use of the

Dutch language ensured that the interviewees could respond in their mother tongue without having to think too much about the formulation of their answers in a different language, making the interviews more spontaneous.

Furthermore, the interviews were based on the semi-structured method. This made it possible to have an open but yet structured conversation with the fashion journalists. Firstly relevant topics were highlighted to be able to lead the conversation through a certain guideline. The topics consisted of three stages: the general meaning of fashion, fashion in relation to politics and finally the specific cases and their use of political statements in their collection. In addition, questions were formulated corresponding to each of the topics that needed to be addressed in order to receive all relevant information (Bryman, 2012: 471). It was important to firstly know what the fashion editors exactly constitute as fashion and politics in order to be able to analyse their thoughts about the relation between the two concepts. Furthermore these topics provided the opportunity to discover what is perceived as a political statement within the fashion industry and how it can manifest itself, which provided insights into the way political statements can be present within fashion. Lastly, after these concepts were clarified, the final stage would provide a context in which the specific fashion houses and their use of political statements could be discussed. The specific interview questions can be found in the interview guide within the appendix of this research.

During the interview images of the specific examined collections were shown to the interviewees in order to stimulate the conversation. These images portrayed every single look that was part of the presented collection of the fashion house in question. The collection images can be found in the appendix section. The interviews all lasted about one hour and were either held at the workplace of the editors or in a café. In all cases it was ensured that the environment was quiet and calm, in order to conduct the interview in a quietly and concentrated way. The fact that I had previously met with some of the interviewees did not negatively affect the research, due to the notion that I was conscious about the fact to pursue an objective conversation.

3.3 Data Analysis

Within this section I will elaborate on the choices regarding the analysis of the discovered data from both the articles and interviews. A thematic approach has been used in order to identify the relevant main themes and gain a complete view on the research question. However, within the two different methods of data collection, slightly different tactics have been used, which I will elaborate on in the following section.

3.3.1 Qualitative content analysis

The method of qualitative content analysis is used in order to examine in what way fashion houses have used political statements in their collections and how the fashion editors subsequently perceived these messages. Through the content analysis, information is discovered about the way the specific fashion houses are connected to the theme of political statements regarding women's rights and emancipation. Collection statements within articles were analysed, which gave important information about the thoughts and inspiration of the designers related to the presented political statements in their collection. Furthermore, the data from the different articles provided background information about the examined collections, how the show was portrayed and what the general ideas about this collection were. It became clear that in comparison to the interviews, the articles provided more objective information regarding the use and perception of the political statements. From the content analysis similarities and differences regarding the perception on the political statements by the fashion industry could be recognized.

The relevant data is discovered through a thematic analysis, where underlying themes within the documents related to the research question are being identified and subsequently analysed (Bryman, 2012: 557). The articles have been read several times in order to recognise all the relevant themes that contribute to answer the research question. The thematic analysis is shaped through the tactic of coding, which implies a categorization of segments of the collected data (Charmaz, 2006: 43). This makes it possible to recognise and describe the relevant parts of the articles. Here, particular themes and subthemes were constructed that were recurring and seemed essentially linked to the topic of the research question (idem: 579). It became clear that several themes emerged out of the articles. First of all the question whether the fashion house is considered to be politically engaged, proved to be of relevance in order to examine the political statement within the collection. Also in what way the made political statement was a true portrayal of the debates around women's rights and emancipation, was a topic that was often discussed and provided important information. Then the link to the election process of Donald Trump was an important indicator to be able to examine the cases within the context of this political event. Finally, the theme of meaning and sincerity was discovered, which is related to the way in which fashion intermediaries perceived the political statement in terms of sincerity and meaning; whether the made statement could be considered as true and sincere or empty and meaningless.

These themes represented the way in which the specific collection was portrayed by the fashion houses and perceived by the fashion editors. Furthermore, the themes provided a framework for the analysed fragments, in order to be able to categorize them. Through this

framework of the collected data it became possible to compare the segments of texts and to recognize possible contrasts or agreements. Solely the parts of the article that presented information about these specific topics were coded. The constructed themes that followed from the coding method are visualized in table 1.

Table 1: Themes regarding specific fashion houses Dior, Prada, Prabal Gurung, Versace and Missoni

Link to politics in general	Political statement of women's rights/ emancipation	Link to the election process of Trump	Meaningful/ Sincerity
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3.3.2 Interviews

All the interviews with the fashion editors were transcribed and subsequently analysed with the thematic method. Through the thematic analysis insights can be given regarding the connection of the theme of political statements with the specific fashion house in question. Through this process relevant themes were defined and subsequently merged into different categories, in order to make sense of the relevant information (Boeije, 2010: 119). Consequently, the underlying meanings related to the studied phenomenon can then be discovered (Bryman, 2012: 495).

The coding categories were created on the basis of themes that recurred in the interviews after thorough reading of the transcripts that form the data (Bryman, 2012: 579). The collected data that was organised within the eventual main themes is displayed within two matrix schemes. One is specified on the specific cases, which is the same as was used for the content analysis, and focuses on the elements that form the perception of the fashion editors. In comparison to the articles, the theme of meaning and sincerity was extensively covered within the interviews, and the other themes occurred as well but often in a more detailed way. The second scheme contains themes related to more general information about the relation between fashion and politics, political statements within fashion and whether such statements can be considered as a trend development. The use of these matrix schemes leads to the opportunity to compare the different cases and the information that was given by the different editors. The discovered relevant themes from the interviews have been visualized in two schemes, which are presented in table 1 and table 2, where the former corresponds to the same scheme that was used for the content analysis. The

interviews were conducted and subsequently transcribed in Dutch, by which the used fragments had to be translated into English for the analysis. I translated the fragments myself due to efficiency, and regarding my knowledge of the course of the interviews.

Table 2: General themes regarding fashion and politics

Concept of fashion	Politics and fashion	Political statement in fashion	Trend
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3.4 Implications

Naturally, the made methodological choices have several implications for the outcome of this research. Since this is a qualitative research it is hard to generalize the outcomes to other contexts (Bryman, 2012: 406). This is reflected in the external validity that will be low since this research focuses on a small number of specific cases. This results in a focus on the exploration of meanings of the studied social phenomenon (Malterud, 2001: 483). Therefore, the goal of this research is to provide detailed insights into the different cases, which helps us to understand the mechanisms and underlying processes that are relevant for the perception of political statements within the fashion industry. These discovered mechanisms related to the specific cases might be applicable to other cases within the fashion industry as well. In addition, the underlying processes of the way in which statements are perceived could also be relevant for wider and other contexts. Therefore, this research contributes to the inductive process of theory building. The internal validity of this research will be high, due to the use of qualitative interviews, which illustrate the cause-effect relation in a clear way (Bryman, 2012: 390).

On top of this, the choice has been made in this research to make use of triangulation. In order to answer the research question, two different research methods are applied: qualitative interviews and qualitative content analysis. In this way, findings that derive from the analysis may be crosschecked and compared to one another (idem: 717). The use of triangulation can result in greater confidence in the findings due to the use of the different methods when examining the same social phenomenon (idem: 392).

The concept of ecological validity is expected to be rather low, but is however partly valid. Through the use of interviews in artificial settings and by not gathering the data in the natural habitat of the fashion editors, the research findings are likely to be less ecologically valid. However, with the used methodologies of qualitative interviewing and content analysis,

the aim has been pursued to analyse the studied events through the eyes of the fashion intermediaries. This makes it possible to interpret the social world from the perspective of the people that give meaning to these events (Bryman, 2012: 399). The used methods capture the conditions and opinions that are present in everyday life (Cicourel, 1982: 15), as is the case with the fashion intermediaries regarding the perception of the used political statements by fashion houses.

Since this is a qualitative research, the reliability is expected to be low. This is because an individual has collected, coded and analysed the data. Within the content analysis it is possible that another person interprets the relevant information in a different way. In addition, the possibility exists that within the interview the interviewee gives slightly different answers to other interviewers. Eventually, this can result in slightly different outcomes of the research (idem: 47). However, this possibility has been reduced as much as possible, by providing a clear overview of the made choices when collecting and analysing the data in this method section.

4. Analysis

Within this chapter the analysis of the collected data through the interviews and articles will be presented. First, I will introduce a part devoted to the contextualization in which the researched collections of the fashion houses were presented. I will begin with an illustration of the relevant political context in which the researched events took place. As stated earlier in the introduction, this is the context of the previous American presidential election process between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, which provoked different heated debates regarding women's rights and emancipation. I will illustrate in what way the fashion industry is connected to this specific political context, which influenced the political reactions that were eventually portrayed by the fashion houses.

After this connection is clarified, I will elaborate on the aspects that form a political statement within the fashion industry through the eyes of the fashion editors. This will help to gain understanding what fashion editors constitute as a political statement and the way in which fashion houses have used these political statements as a reaction to the debates around women's rights and emancipation. Subsequently, I will present each case related to the five different fashion houses of Dior, Prabal Gurung, Prada, Versace and Missoni. An in-depth analysis will take place in order to gain specific insights on the way these fashion houses have used political statements in their collections, and how this is subsequently perceived by the industry itself. Finally, I will present the discussion of the findings, where overarching connections between relevant parts of this research and theory will be drawn. Here, underpinnings, nuances and additions in relation to the existed theory within the politics of fashion will be made.

4.1 The election process of Donald Trump and the events around women's rights and emancipation

From the beginning of 2016 the presidential election process within the United States started, where the new president would be elected on the eighth of November 2016. In July within that same year it became clear that Donald Trump would be the final candidate for the Republican Party and Hillary Clinton the nominee for the Democratic Party (Dombey, 2016). The presidential election was the focus point of several global debates around different issues, since the government of the U.S. is one of the most important key actors within the global political realm (Putman, 2016). This caused that the U.S. elections and accompanying campaigns went beyond the borders of its own nation and became of great matter for other countries around the world as well (The Guardian, 2016). One of the issues that was the centre of the debate around this election, was the topic women's rights and emancipation

(Siddiqui, 2018). During the election process this topic gained worldwide attention because several allegations were made against Trump about sexual misconduct towards women (Schriock, 2018; Barbaro and Twohey, 2016; Khomami, 2017). In addition, the position of women within the working place and their role within family, were put into question by the same presidential candidate (Berenson, 2016). Made remarks by Trump such as *“putting a wife to work is a very dangerous thing”*, lead to the result that the debates got even more intense (ibid.). With the leak of previously taped remarks made by Trump regarding sexist comments about women and the famous fragment where he stated that men should just *“grab them (i.e. women) by the pussy”* when they want a woman, the debate quickly became inseparably linked to Trump and his behaviour towards women (Putman, 2016). The debate around women's rights and emancipation became even more polarised because of the role of Hillary Clinton within this process, who was running to become the first female president of the United States (Collinson, 2016). With this goal she radically went against Trump's opinions within this debate, by very visually portraying herself as an advocate for women's rights and gender equality (ibid.).

The debates regarding women's rights and emancipation did not stop after the election process was over and Trump was elected as the 45th president of the U.S. It is a common believe that the governmental administration of Donald Trump has challenged the position of women within the United States (Siddiqui, 2018; Schriock, 2018). Sujata Moorti, professor of feminist studies at the Middlebury College in Vermont, has stated that women will be disadvantaged by the administration of Trump: “As for women's rights, Trump's victory has in effect legitimised misogyny - the sexism, particularly the violent imagery directed at Clinton, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia that characterised so many Republican campaigns have now been authorised by voters” (Moorti as cited in Sarhan, 2016). In addition, Trump signed laws that challenged women's health regarding the removal of funding for organizations such as Planned Parenthood and other organisations that are positive towards abortion (Davis, 2017). According to Heidi Williamson, a senior policy analyst for the Women's Health and Rights Program, this development has lead to the harming of women's health: “Trump's actions are creating very real and damaging consequences for millions of women and their families, inflicting direct harm on already vulnerable communities” (Williamson as cited in Davis, 2017).

These newly inflamed debates regarding women's health relating to limiting birth control access, gender equality and equal pay rule resulted in movements like the Women's March, Time's Up and the Me Too movement (Schriock, 2018; Khomami, 2017). In this research the focus will particularly lie on the Women's March, since this movement had a

worldwide impact (Khomami, 2017), emerged and remained active during the collection presentations of the fashion houses, and is therefore a potential influence on the presented political statements of the fashion houses. Within the Women's Marches demonstrators wore self-knitted 'pussy hats', pink-coloured hats with cat-ears that served as a reference to the earlier made comment by president Trump regarding the female genitalia, which quickly became a symbol for women activism against the current political administration (Walters, 2017). Women and men from different backgrounds that participated in the march were united in their belief in women's rights (Siegfried, 2017). The organisers of the march declared this same message regarding the new administration, stating that: "The march will send a bold message to our new administration on their first day in office, and to the world that women's rights are human rights" (Gottbrath, 2018). After these significant events, women (and men) have continued to make visible statements regarding these topics, aiming at their government to support women's rights and emancipation (ibid.).

4.2 Political statements as a reaction of the fashion world

As stated before, fashion is inseparably connected to its context, especially with its political context. This leads to the development that rather than just presenting the upcoming trends, runway shows are also used as a tool and opportunity for brands to present their (political) thoughts (Fisher, 2018). In the case of the election process of president Donald Trump, a big part of the fashion industry reacted very visually and took a standpoint in different ways within the debate, by demonstrating political messages within their collections on the runway (Binkley, 2017; Lang, 2017). In order to analyse this development in detail, the relation between the concepts of fashion and politics within the specific political context of the election process in the U.S. regarding women's rights and emancipation, will be presented through the data of the interviews and analysed documents. Hereafter, the concept of the political statement as viewed by the fashion editors will be clarified. Subsequently there will be given an overview of the different reactions of the fashion world to the election process within the U.S. and the debates around women's rights and emancipation.

4.2.1 Fashion and its political context within the election process

In agreement with the previously presented theory regarding the connection between fashion and politics, all interviewees mentioned that fashion is intrinsically linked to its context, and therefore also to the political context. This indicates an existing unified vision regarding the presence of the connection between fashion and the political context. With this comes the reasoning that designers are creative people and conceptual thinkers who are influenced by

their direct environment (Interview 2, 3). Viewed as one of the most powerful persons in fashion, editor-in-chief of the American Vogue Anna Wintour responds to the significant political events that are intertwined with the fashion industry. She highlights that fashion is intersected with the society and its politics: “I think that whatever you see on the runways or on the streets, in a movie, on your Instagram feed, whatever it may be, fashion can tell you what’s going on in the world” (Wintour as cited in Amed, 2017). In addition, Wintour makes the remark that the election of Trump will therefore inevitably lead to certain reactions within the industry. This illustrates a sentiment among the fashion industry that the political context of the election process of Trump and the debates around women’s rights are indeed connected and influential to the field of fashion.

As the interviewed fashion journalists agree, the use of this political context by fashion houses can occur both consciously and unconsciously (Interview 1 and 3). It is argued by the same interviewees that the designer has a connection to the society as a source of inspiration, and he or she has to create items that meet the needs of consumer. Because the fashion industry is considered to be a very fast system, it is argued that these contextual influences have an immediate effect on collections (Interview 3). However, a counter-thought to this process is that many designers keep themselves completely separated from political events and simply go on with their formula of designing clothes (Interview 2). Although not all designers are explicitly inspired by their societal and political context, the designers who do get inspiration from the context they function in, are identified as most relevant and influential within the fashion industry (Interview 3 and 6).

The connection between the fashion industry and the specific political context of the election process around Donald Trump is identified by interviewee 2 and 4 as a significant event that lead to direct responses from the fashion industry. Especially the debates around women emancipation that emerged within the process, led to even more fashion houses using this very visibly as an inspiration within their collections: “Before Trump became president, I think less political statements were made in fashion. Certainly the big fashion houses, they were really less pronounced” (Interview 6). This idea is underlined by Vanessa Friedman, fashion editor of the New York Times, who states that in 2016 “clothes went beyond products to become positions” (Friedman, 2016). She argues that in that time fashion became more political than ever, due to several political events like the new elected president of the United States. Also Steven Kolb, the president of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, stated that fashion has always been political, but acknowledged that with the presidential election process this has become even more prominently present within the industry (Kolb as cited in Landers, 2017). As the election process proceeded, designers

got very political with their collections (Fisher, 2017). Hereafter, the causal connection was quickly made between the American political situation and the visible reaction of the fashion world (ibid.).

4.2.2 What is a political statement in fashion?

From the theoretical framework it became clear that the political messages of different fashion houses can be identified as political statements. In this research the perception of fashion editors is analysed in order to gain understanding in the meaning of political statements regarding women's rights and emancipation. It is therefore relevant to examine what is regarded as a political statement within the fashion industry by the fashion editors themselves. In general, a political statement is very broadly viewed; it can manifest itself in many different forms. According to the most interviewees, the ways in which a political statement becomes visible in a collection is reduced to two forms: either it is a very visual and 'obvious' statement, or a more intrinsically intertwined statement that is part of the whole collection (Interview 1, 3, 4, 6). The example of an obvious statement that is most often given by the interviewees is the slogan T-shirt, mostly related to the house of Dior where featured in its Spring 2017 collection (Interview 1, 3, 5, 6). Here the house of Dior made T-shirts with politically loaded slogans like 'We Should All Be Feminists'. As was stated by the fashion editor 1: "Maria Grazia Chiuri [i.e. the creative director of Dior] made an incredibly political statement with that T-shirt". On the one hand these statements are being perceived as empty and meaningless, while at the same time the potentially wider impact of this statement is being considered a good cause (Interview 1, 2, 5). According to interviewee 2, a clear message within a statement is required to reach the mass: "A shirt like that is understandable for everyone and is very direct in its message. So that's a smart move".

Examples given by the fashion editors that describe an intrinsic statement are often related to fashion houses such as Céline or Prada (Interview 1, 3, 4, 6). These fashion houses are known within the fashion industry for their wearable and foremost practical items that fit with the working women of today and portray a statement that is interwoven in the entire collection (ibid.). Although a slogan T-shirt is perceived by the fashion editors as visually stronger statement, a garment of houses as Prada and Céline is argued to be matching with the wants and needs of women in current times, and is therefore also perceived by the interviewees as a political statement regarding feminism (Interview 1, 4, 6). This matches with the ideas presented earlier in the theoretical framework, in relation to the third wave of feminism, where women take control of their bodies and femininity, which results in the opportunity for women to express individuality and achieve empowerment.

Here, fashion is perceived as a tool for femininity in an empowering way. Preference is often given to this method of portraying a political statement: “These clothing items really say something about how women want to dress today” (Interview 1). With this comes the assumption that a feminist would not want to wear such slogan T-shirts: “Clothing that I would like to wear as a modern women with a busy life and being a feminist, is not necessarily the collection of those houses with those slogan T-shirts. If we need a T-shirt to portray this vision, we have hit rock bottom I think” (Interview 3).

Whether a statement is perceived as meaningful and sincere is also an important factor within the realisation of the perception of such statement. Almost all the interviewees link the types of statements that are more obviously presented to being less sincere (Interview 1, 2, 3, 5, 6). As stated by interviewee 3: “Such an obvious statement does not have that much depth for me, it's more an Instagram-statement”. On top of this exists the assumption that a collection that initially looks less politically involved may be politically more relevant than collections where statements are clearly visible: “Real meaning is found in beautiful suits in which women can win a war, so to speak, but not a T-shirt with a slogan. That is just too easy. A political statement is not necessarily that one has to pronounce his or her ideas literally” (Interview 3).

Besides the possibility that a political statement can be portrayed in the clothes of a collection, some interviewees mention that a political statement within fashion can manifest itself in other aspects as well. It can emerge in the chosen models that show the collection on the runway, the location of the show or the décor (Interview 1, 2, 5). This fits with the idea of a sincere political statement. In most cases, the condition to be considered as a true and sincere statement is that the idea of this statement has to be carried throughout in the whole business model: “Those political statements must go further than just the presentation of a collection. It should also be featured in the business model in a structural way” (Interview 4). In addition, interviewee 6 states that when claiming to care about women emancipation in a collection, this should also be visible within the house itself to give true meaning to such statement: “It must be more than just a statement on a shirt. It is really about the total picture”.

4.2.3 The political reaction of the fashion world

In relation to the several comments made by Trump regarding women’s rights, health and emancipation, parts of the fashion industry visibly reacted. During the election process prominent people in the fashion world took a standpoint. It became clear that within the fashion scene of New York, the majority of the industry openly supported Hillary Clinton

during the election process (Landers, 2017). There was a sponsored fashion show held by American fashion houses such as Marc Jacobs, Tory Burch and Diane von Furstenberg, who created T-shirts with the slogan “I’m With Her” that were made as a fundraising tool for the Democratic presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton (ibid.). American Vogue’s Anna Wintour co-hosted the event together with Clinton’s daughter Chelsea Clinton. This event was perceived by the fashion media as a true proof that fashion was taking a position against Trump (Safronova, 2016).

With the inauguration of Donald Trump other reactions from the fashion industry followed. In regard to the made comments by Trump about the position of women in society and the “grab them by the pussy” incident, a boycott was started by an anti-trump movement against fashion retailers that sold fashion brands owned by the Trump family (Binkley, 2017). The movement, which goes under the name of ‘Grab Your Wallet’, was picked up by designers as well who spoke in favour of the movement (Owen and Khomami, 2017). With this, certain American fashion retailers such as Nordstrom and Macy's decided to remove the shoe collection of Trumps daughter Ivanka Trump from their collection (ibid.). In addition, some high-end fashion designers like Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs announced they would not dress the first lady for any formal occasions (Binkley, 2017).

Further political reactions of the fashion industry became mostly visible during the following Fashion Weeks, especially in New York (Friedman, 2016). Here, it was stated that the runway became a platform to visually portray the political messages fashion houses wanted to share with their audience (Landers, 2017; Lang, 2017). Specifically focused on the topic of women’s rights and emancipation, politically charged designs were presented during collection presentations (Safronova, 2017). This became highly visible within shows like the ones of Prabal Gurung and Public School, where the models walked in statement T-shirts with slogans such as “The Future is Female”, “Girls Just Want To Have Fundamental Rights” and “We need Leaders” (Landers, 2017; Safronova, 2017). Designers like Adam Lippes and Adam Selman declared their allegiance to the Planned Parenthood movement and gender equality through the use of signs and slogans related to the topics within their collections (Lang, 2017). All these fashion shows were perceived as portraying a vocal support for women (Binkley, 2017). Together with this, the Council of Fashion Designers of America publicly campaigned for the organisation of Planned Parenthood, referring to the signed law by Trump taking aim at Planned Parenthood funding (ibid.). Here the organization distributed pink pins with the quote “Fashion Stands With Planned Parenthood” (Safronova, 2017b). Several designers like Diane von Furstenberg, Narciso Rodriguez, Tory Burch and Zac Posen wore the pins during their finale walk at their collection presentation (ibid.).

However, not solely in America fashion designers were portraying their political ideas regarding women emancipation. Also in London, Milan, and Paris designers were using their platforms to show their political engagement (Torgerson, 2017). Already during the election process, Dior had a politically loaded show, with statements on T-shirts with slogans like “We Should All Be Feminists” and “Dio(R)evolution” (Torgerson, 2017). Another remarkable brand identified by the media was Italian brand Missoni, who displayed a clear statement regarding women’s rights after Trumps inauguration during Milan fashion week (ibid.). Here, Women's March-inspired pussy-hats were presented during the show. During the Fashion Weeks of Milan and London labels like Prada, Versace and Céline were identified as houses that made tributes to the woman of today, by designing clothes with a feminist connotation (Cartner-Morley, 2017). Versace embroidered slogans on the designed items, containing statements such as “Equality”, “Power” and “Love” (Truman, 2017), while Prada made a subtle reference to female power by given the show the title “The City of Women” (The Cut, 2017). Within the show of Céline a subtle reference was made to the changing political times, by presenting a literal wake-up call by the use of a moving décor, which forced the audience to look beyond the clothes and really look at the women that were showing the items, and the other people present at the show (Chernikoff, 2017b).

Within the fashion industry, fashion editors and magazines sometimes perceive this focus on feminist debates as a trend, where it almost becomes compelling for designers to use their platform to make political statements (Reed and Moore, 2017; Interview 1, 4, 6). This is because of the repetition of politically charged in collection presentations of multiple fashion houses. As stated by interviewee 5: “Because this trend is visible in the entire fashion world by the amount of political statements that are made, it almost becomes suspicious if a fashion house does not make a remark about it”. With this comes the made remark that a lot of designers normally do not use any political references in their collections, but regarding the heated debates suddenly need to participate as well and show which side they are on (Interview 6). According to interviewee 1, a risk that can occur with this development is that the credibility of such made statements are not always as strong, where it becomes really hard for a fashion house to seem authentic and sincere. Whether fashion houses therefore make these statements with a sincere intention or just ‘free ride’ on the hype is hard to say as interviewee 4 states.

Overall, it became clear that the events around the election process regarding women’s rights and emancipation had an impact on the fashion world. The debates were fuelled by the attitude of Trump and he is perceived as the instigator of them: “People suddenly have something to be very angry about” (Interview 6). However, interviewee 6

argues that in general it was not necessarily an anti-Trump sentiment that was present within the fashion world, but rather several ways of showing solidarity with the challenged position of women and gender equality. To analyse in what way these political statements regarding the support of women's rights and emancipation were used and perceived more specifically, I will now focus on the five chosen cases. For each fashion house I will provide a brief introduction into the history of the brand and who is in charge of the creative direction at this moment. Subsequently, I will illustrate the chosen collection of the fashion house in question and analyse the idea behind the design, presentation and thus the statement. Hereafter, the perception of the made political statements will be analysed. The analysis for each individual fashion house consists of the gathered data from both the qualitative content analysis and the qualitative interviews. The generated data from the two different methods is used in combination with each other in order to illustrate a complete and coherent view.

4.3 Dior

Dior is one of the most significant and powerful luxury fashion houses within the fashion industry (Foley, 2016; Business of Fashion, 2018b). The label exists since 1947 when it was founded by the French designer Christian Dior, and has ever since been a prominent label within the industry (Foley, 2016). The collection of Dior that will be analysed in this research is the Spring 2017 collection. A few months before the presentation of this collection took place, the French luxury fashion house employed a new creative director, also the first female designer of the house: Maria Grazia Chiuri (Dior, 2018). She previously worked for the Italian fashion house Valentino for seventeen years and this was her first collection for Dior (Business of Fashion, 2018).

4.3.1 The use of a political statement of feminism

The Dior Spring 2017 collection was presented on the 30th of September 2016 at Paris Fashion Week, which was during the presidential election process of the United States. Before the start of the show Dior released a collection statement containing fragments of an essay of Nigerian feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and stated that the aim of the collection was to "examine the place of women in society" (Cartner-Morley, 2017b). This seems to be related to the feminist theory on fashion as earlier presented, where the position of women in society is constantly challenged and examined. During the show a soundtrack of Beyoncé played, which featured Ngozi Adichie's famous TEDx talk regarding her book "We Should All be Feminists", that became instantly popular after it was sampled in Beyoncé's music (Yotka, 2016; Friedman, 2016b).

The collection of Dior consisted of black and white feminine dresses and suits, and two very notable T-shirts with slogans “We Should All Be Feminists” and “Dior(R)evolution”, also inspired by Ngozi Adichies book (Newbold, 2018). Chiuri stated that she herself wanted to introduce a “natural attitude, to dress women to feel comfortable, to feel their beauty” (Chiuri as cited in Foley, 2016). Furthermore, Chiuri argued that the main message was completely focussed on the individuality of women (Newbold, 2018). This strongly relates to the earlier presented feminist theory regarding the third wave of feminism, where fashion is perceived as a tool for the embracement of female femininity and individuality in order to empower women. Chiuri states that one of the inspirations behind the collection was the sport of fencing: “The art of fencing involves mind and heart at the same time, which women always need if they are to realize themselves” (Chiuri as cited in Newbold, 2018). Fashion media agreed upon the notion that with this show Chiuri used her new position as a platform for her political ideas regarding feminism (Newbold, 2018; Yotka, 2016; Friedman, 2016; Friedman, 2017; Cartner-Morley, 2017). Chiuri mentions this same aspect, as being one of the true fundamentals of the French fashion house: “Dior is feminine. Feminism for me is about equal opportunities” (Chiuri as cited in Cartner-Morley, 2017b). In an interview with Vogue, Chiuri furthermore mentions that the underlying message of the collection is more important to her than the actual design. Once she saw a young girl wearing a fake version of the famous slogan shirt, but with the same message: “She wore it because she believed in the message. To me that is more important than my design because it starts a conversation” (Chiuri as cited in Newbold, 2018).

4.3.2 The perception of the political statement

Through the interviews it became clear that the house of Dior is not perceived as a politically engaged fashion label by the fashion editors (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 6). However, since the appointment of Chiuri, the fashion house is recognized by some interviewees as more politically engaged than ever before (Interview 1, 2, 4). This was also identified by the fashion magazines, which all wrote about the visibility in the collection through the use of the highly notable slogan T-shirts. With this, it became clear that this first collection of Chiuri for the house of Dior was focused on feminism. This specific shirt has provoked many different reactions. On the one hand, it was perceived as a strong and successful political statement regarding women emancipation: “Everyone still talks about the shirt of Dior. It has really become a benchmark for political activism in fashion” (Interview 1).

With the political statement being portrayed this literally, Chiuri has ensured that feminism became more accessible to a wider audience, as several interviewees and

magazines claim (1, 2, 6; Foley, 2016). According to interviewee 1 and 2 this could happen because of the large impact of the shirt; it was picked up by all fashion press and it became a big hit under fashion influencers and Instagram. It was thought that this was also due to the size of Dior's platform, which made the concept of feminism more accepted: "Dior has made it more acceptable to call yourself a feminist" (Interview 6). However, on the other hand, the shirt was perceived as an easy and precarious statement with little substantive relevance by the majority of the interviewees and one fashion outlet (Interview 1, 2, 3, 6; Friedman, 2017). For a big part of the fashion editors this connected to the obvious use of the statement and that it is literally portrayed on the clothes (Interview 1, 3, 5, 6).

Furthermore, the fact that Dior incorporated a commercial aspect related to sales to the shirts, the T-shirt was sold for an approximate 500 euros, results in the notion that the statement is not considered as authentic and sincere by the majority of the interviewees (Interview 1, 2, 3, 6). According to interviewee 1, there exists a friction between the use of political statements and the commercial aspect of sales. The intended sincere meaning of such statement is perceived as less sincere and meaningful because it was used for commercial sales. With the use of politically loaded slogans on T-shirts the main message of the fashion house was quite clear, according to the majority of both the interviewees and magazines (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; Friedman, 2016b; Foley, 2016; Friedman, 2017). Although the T-shirt was the main link to feminism, intermediaries report on the visibility of the message, however limited, within the rest of the collection as well (Interview 1, 4; Yotka, 2016, Friedman, 2016b; Foley, 2016). References are made to the flat sneakers that were presented together with tailored jackets and feminine dresses as a depiction of female strength and the embracement of femininity (Yotka, 2016; Interview 4). In addition, the clothing that made references to the theme of fencing, were perceived as the portrayal of female warriors by interviewee 4 and 6. This relates to the notion of the theoretical connection between fashion and feminism, where the feminist view on fashion is related to the perception of women as either victims or as warriors, where in this case fashion portrays the latter.

However, not everyone agrees with this translation of the message to the actual clothing. As a whole, the collection was not considered as very emancipated by some media outlets and almost all interviewees (Friedman, 2017; Foley, 2016; Interview 1, 2, 3, 5, 6). With this, the entire collection was perceived as too easy by interviewee 3: "I find it a bit disappointing that a modern woman of whom you have very high expectations, deals with this important theme in a very easy way and does not really make clothes that feel modern". Although the timing of the collection was at the right moment regarding the globally heated

debate about women emancipation, the statement was not perceived as a sincere feminist statement by most interviewees (Interview 1, 2, 3, 5, 6). The fashion magazines did not very often report about the topic of sincerity, except for one which vision matched with the interviewees (Friedman, 2017).

According to interviewee 5, the missing link between the statements on the shirts and the rest of the collection was an important element in the construction of her negative perception: “What Maria Grazia is trying is to evoke a kind of revolution for feminism. But it's not happening if you actually look at the clothes”, The connection with the collection proves to remain crucial, also according to interviewee 6: “I really like the fact that Chiuri promoted the theme of feminism, but that does not make it good fashion right away”. In addition, according to some interviewees, the collection did not portray strong and independent women, which was however clearly the intended message (Interview 2, 5). According to interviewee 5 this was due to the choice of a non-diverse group of models, particularly consisting of “white and skinny” girls, which indicates the sentiment of fashion as a tool of oppression regarding women’s beauty. This relates to the theory of feminism, where the intended power through fashion is partly misguided through these prevailing beauty standards of being white, young and skinny.

Together with this comes the idea that if feminism is the important message, this collection not necessarily fits with the needs of a modern feminist (Friedman, 2017; Interview 1, 3, 6). “A real feminist does not buy a 500 euro shirt from Dior” (Interview 1), and “These are not the clothes of revolution” (Friedman, 2017) were opinions about the feminist aspect in the collection. Regardless of the sincerity of the statement, the link to the debates around women's rights and emancipation within the election process of Donald Trump was clearly recognized by the interviewees, however it was not covered in the articles (Interview 1, 2, 3, 6).

4.4 Prabal Gurung

The Nepalese American fashion designer Prabal Gurung founded his eponymous label in 2009 in New York, and debuted his first collection in the same year during New York Fashion Week (The Business of Fashion, 2018e). His designs are featured in leading fashion magazines and are regularly worn by public figures (ibid.). Ever since the start, Gurung’s label is commercially on the forefront of the American and global fashion industry (Rao, 2017).

4.4.1 The use of a political statement of feminism and diversity

The specific collection that will be examined in this research is the Autumn/Winter 2017 collection presented during New York Fashion Week on the 13th of February 2017, which was after the inauguration of Donald Trump took place. The show of Prabal Gurung took place in a minimalist set where very feminine and subtle dresses were displayed on the runway (Iredale, 2017). However, during the finale of the show Prabal Gurung presented T-shirts with political slogans like: “Nevertheless, She Persisted”, “The Future is Female” and “Girls Just Want To Have Fundamental Rights” (Phelps, 2017). When the designer himself came out on the stage to receive the applause, he was wearing a similar T-shirt with the slogan “This Is What A Feminist Looks Like” (ibid.). Gurung himself states that part of his inspiration for this collection came from the Women's March, which just happened one month before the show (Rao, 2017). “They set an example for the rest of us that by peaceful resistance, we can make some changes. It took women to do that. So I wanted to capture that” (Gurung as cited in Reed and Moore, 2017).

For Gurung, women need to be able to feel powerful: “I’ve always felt like the biggest strength from a woman comes from understanding and embracing femininity. It’s all about the power of women, the power of dressing up, the power of choices” (Gurung as cited in Rao, 2017). This notion is strongly linked to the earlier presented thought of third wave feminism, related to the empowerment of women in their individual femininity. For Gurung, the issue of women emancipation and the empowerment of the women of today is something he has intertwined with his label from the very beginning: “Having come from where I come from — from Nepal and a single mother who brought us up — it’s been my thing since day one. So to me feminism is not just a trending topic. It’s the only way I’ve known, even before I knew what feminism was” (Gurung as cited in Reed and Moore, 2017). In an interview Gurung himself makes a clear reference to the administration of Donald Trump and how this has challenged the position of the American citizens regarding topics such as equality, diversity and inclusivity (Maisey, 2018) According to Gurung, the choice for the politically charged T-shirts came as a natural result from the events that were happening: “It’s the right thing to do. It is basic human decency. There is nothing political about it” (Gurung as cited in Landers, 2017). This gives the impression that the use of these political statements has become personal for Gurung, which indicates a link to the second wave feminist notion that every personal event is politically related. Gurung furthermore states that he sees the collection presentation as a way to communicate his message, as he uses the runway as a tool for exchange of ideas and thoughts (Gurung as cited in Maisey, 2018). Furthermore, it is notable that a part of the proceeds from the collection were donated to the American Civil

Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, and Gurung's own Shikshya Foundation Nepal (Binkley, 2017).

4.4.2 The perception of the political statement

All the interviewed fashion journalists agree upon the notion that the fashion house of Prabal Gurung is undoubtedly not linked to any political engagement in the past. As stated by interviewee 3: "He makes beautiful clothes, but never showed himself so politically engaged". However, since the Autumn/Winter 2017 show, Gurung has been perceived as politically concerned, and is portrayed as a "socially minded designer" by one interviewee and magazine article (Interview 6; Rao, 2017).

It became clear from both the interviews as the articles that Gurung used his platform to present his political message related to the debates around women's rights and emancipation and the topic of diversity (Interview 1, 2, 3, 5, 6; Phelps, 2017; Iredale, 2017; Maisey, 2018; Reed and Moore, 2017). Although it was striking that such a political statement was presented, it did not come as a total surprise for some of the fashion intermediaries. Gurung is described as a designer who has always made comfortable clothing for women that support them in their daily lives (Interview 6). With this comes that it is known that Gurung himself is an immigrant, which causes that the statements of Trump presumably had a direct impact on him (Interview 3, 6).

The collection presentation took place after Trump was officially elected president, which, according to interviewee 4, makes it the right platform to present his political thoughts: "It just feels sincere because what happened is so close to his personal background". Furthermore, the intended message on feminism was noticed in other aspects of the collection than solely the shirts by the intermediaries; models from different backgrounds and measurements would walk down the runway showing his collection, which was identified as a clear statement for diversity and a progressive choice to change the prevailing beauty standards (Interview 2, 5, 6; Phelps, 2017; Rao, 2017; Maisey, 2018; Iredale, 2017). This indicates a resemblance with the third wave feminist theory and in some way also with the second wave of feminism. This is due to the notion that fashion should be used as a tool to empower women, but however through the change of the prevailing beauty standards that make it impossible for women to accomplish this. The political statement of feminism that Gurung presents and the link it has to the election process of president Donald Trump regarding the issue of women emancipation, is mentioned by few interviewees and magazine articles (Interview 2, 4, 5; Chernikoff, 2017; Rao, 2017). His designs were however perceived

as a political statement in support of women's rights by all interviewees and magazine articles.

However, there have been some questions related to the sincerity of the statement in relation to the collection as a whole. Beside the shirts, interviewee 1 notes that the rest of the collection did not include any references to the message Gurung was portraying: "If he didn't make those T-shirts, very few people would still remember this show". The rest of the collection featured very feminine styles that were perceived as strong and beautiful, but not influenced by the on-going debates around women emancipation (Interview 2, 3). As interviewee 3 stated: "This collection is not at all influenced by what was happening. Not at all, in any way". This separation between the political statement and the actual clothes is generally perceived as misstep; it is argued that the intended political statement on feminism was not interwoven with the actual collection (Iredale, 2017; Interview 1, 2, 3, 4). This resulted in the idea that the collection as a whole is not perceived as creatively strong: "Good will and good intentions don't always add up to the strongest collection" (Iredale, 2017). With this comes the idea among the interviewees that the T-shirts were added to make the collection more accessible to a less wealthy group of consumers, in order to make it possible for fans of the house to obtain an item from the collection (Interview 1, 2, 5).

In addition, certain interviewees and magazines mentioned that within his collection, Gurung did not deviate from the usual items he normally designs within his brand, which did not present a new vision on femininity (Phelps; 2017; Iredale, 2017; Interview 2, 3, 4). "If you think of 'The Future Is Female', that relates to something impressive and different, right? But instead 'The Future Is Female' is a nice white lace dress, which to me states that the future is just the same" (Interview 2). This notion is comparable to the idea that if fashion should be perceived as a tool of women empowerment, it should provide items that challenge the standard vision on femininity. The intended meaning of his statement did not always send the right message, as stated by some interviewees that one fashion season before Dior had presented its politically loaded slogan T-shirts, which quickly gained global attention of the fashion world (Interview 1, 3, 4). This leads to the perception of the following of a trend, which makes that the statement is perceived as seemingly insincere because the idea of such T-shirt is no longer considered innovative within the industry (Interview 1, 2, 3).

4.5 Prada

Prada is an Italian fashion house founded in 1913 by Mario Prada and his brother Martino in Milan (Prada Group, 2018). Initially specialized in leather goods and trunks, the company later grew out to one of the most known fashion houses of today (Business of Fashion,

2018c). Since 1978 the granddaughter of founder Mario, Miuccia Prada is at the helm of the company after she took over from her mother Luisa Prada. Miuccia Prada was the first one to start designing clothes for the house and constructed the business as it is known today (ibid.).

4.5.1 The use of a political statement of women emancipation

After New York Fashion Week was over, the fashion event moved to Milan where also the house of Prada presented its Autumn/Winter 2017 collection on the 23rd of February 2017. The presentation of the collection had a décor made out of beds and benches with posters of all kinds of women, which gave the impression of teenage girl's bedrooms (Foley, 2017; Frankel, 2017). The collection presentation reflected "The City of Women", inspired after the eponymous 1980's film of the Italian director Federico Fellini, "*La Città Delle Donne*", also the title of the show (Friedman, 2017b). The décor was intended to reflect the role of the modern women, as became clear in a collection statement: "The set identifies the intangible centrality of the contemporary female role both at the domestic and public scale" (Prada as cited in Friedman, 2017b). Although the décor had a message regarding the role of women in society, which is a topic strongly related to the main topics of second wave feminism, Prada states she didn't want to be too political with the presentation of her collection: "They [i.e. the architect bureau that made the decor] had to embrace what's happening in the world but without being too political, because I never want to be too political, directly political, in my job" (Prada as cited in Foley, 2017).

However, in several statements it became clear that for Miuccia Prada fashion is always subtly and intrinsically linked to the political sphere, whether or not voluntary: "Fashion is about the everyday and the everyday is the political stage of our freedoms" (Prada as cited in Foley, 2017). This idea is connected to the feminist thought regarding the notion that 'the personal is political' (Hamisch 1969), which seems to be the case with Prada by stating that fashion is related to society that is inseparably linked to the political sphere. Although no explicit link is made to the political events around Trump, Prada herself makes an implicit reference to these political debates: "I heard that in America, at the Women's March, an old feminist said 'I can't believe that 50 years later we are still in the same place'" (Prada as cited in Cartner-Morley, 2017). "So, of course, we had to do the women's collection after what happened... So this became kind of 'The City of the Women'" (Prada as cited in Foley, 2017). The working method of Prada is described as intelligent and subtle (Interview 1, 4, 6), something that "only very few (if any) working in fashion have ever rivalled" (Frankel, 2017). The message related to women emancipation was therefore also subtly visible in the

collection. Colourful styles were presented, with a combination of dresses and power suits that all had a wide cut that illustrated comfort (Friedman, 2017b). The retro prints that were featured on the clothes were made by a seventies feminist illustrator, which was perceived as a subtle hint from Prada to the importance of the role of women in society (Mower, 2017).

According to Prada it was needed to make a reference to women and their position in society: “It is the usual argument about how women can’t be intelligent and interesting and seductive, too” (Prada as cited in Friedman, 2017b). One important pillar the collection was based upon this idea of smart seduction (Foley, 2017). As Prada stated herself: “You look at this [i.e. the collection] and you see these women who are beautiful but they are also killers” (Prada as cited in Frankel, 2017). Prada stated that the question of seduction leads to an impasse for women: “The problem of women, wanting to appeal, wanting to be beautiful, but how, if you are intelligent, do you do that?” (ibid.). This notion of seduction relating to the embracement of femininity is closely connected to the idea of feminism within the third wave, where a central point is the embracement of femininity and the use of fashion to empower women and their femininity and reject social restrictions on the expression of female sexuality. In addition, this matches with the feminist thought that women can also be feminists when caring about their appearance. With this it becomes clear that Prada decided to look at the political role of women in society: “For the 2017 Fall Winter show, we looked at the role that women have in shaping modern society, their political participation and social achievements” (Mower, 2017).

4.5.2 The perception of the political statement

The fashion house of Prada is highly associated with political engagement within its collections by both the interviewees as the magazine articles (Interview 1, 3, 6; Foley, 2017; Cartner-Morley, 2017; The Cut, 2017). Her personal history has references to politics through her former study of political science and her involvement with the communist party of Italy (Interview 1, 3, 6; Foley, 2017). Her work is sometimes even seen as structurally politically loaded: “Everything she does is political” (Interview 6), which is again a link to the feminist notion that every personal aspect is automatically political. The concept that is argued to be linked to the fashion house, is the image of women through the eyes of Prada herself (Interview 1, 2, 5). Because Miuccia Prada is viewed as a political and intellectual woman, magazines and interviewees state she exactly knows how to make clothes that fit with the women of today: “She will never make a collection that completely misses the point and it is the strong and emancipated woman that buys her collections” (Interview 2). Prada has been

portrayed as “fashion's premier feminist” and the “intellectual of the fashion world” (Cartner-Morley, 2017; Interview 1).

Although Prada herself is perceived as a very political person, the collection was not collectively perceived as a clear political statement by the interviewees (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4). Nevertheless, the majority of the articles within the fashion media did perceive it like that (Foley, 2017; Cartner-Morley, 2017; Frankel, 2017; Mower, 2017). What is identified as most striking within the collection by a large majority of the interviewees (Interview 2, 3, 4, 5) and all the articles, is the link to women emancipation and portrayal of a certain femininity. The collection was perceived as a mixture of the portrayal of the *femme fatale* and the working woman, with a visual connection to the 1970's that resulted in designs that fit with the modern women and emphasize feminine freedom (Friedman, 2017b; Interview 6). In addition, through the use of wide pants, flat shoes and pleasant material, the clothes that were presented were perceived as highly comfortable by interviewee 6.

The implicit message that became visible in the designs was the different ways in which femininity can be displayed related to the topic of seduction in an emancipated society (Interview 1, 2, 3, 5; Frankel, 2017; Friedman, 2017b; Foley, 2017). This specific collection is perceived as a reminder that “Prada was using fashion as a way of talking about the female experience many years before it became fashionable” (Cartner-Morley, 2017). It is within this collection that Prada talks about the re-emergence of the topic regarding the position of women in society, but less explicitly put. With this, it is stated that Prada does not look solely at the events regarding this topic around the election of Trump, but takes it to a more general level by relating it to gender politics and the relationship between men and women within modern society (Cartner-Morley, 2017; Interview 1, 3, 4, 6). “I honestly do not think that she is immediately influenced by such a hype” (Interview 3) and “Because she has always been a feminist, this is no specific reason for her to use it in her collection” (Interview 6), were the made remarks by the interviewees.

Focussing on the topic of gender equality within politics, Prada did not make use of political slogans like previous fashion houses have done. It is stated that this suits her way of working: “She would never make a statement so literally and quickly about anything that happens in the world. It is much more abstract” (Interview 3). In addition, the collection may not be perceived as that political because it is stated that this aspect is always intrinsically present within the life of Prada herself, and therefore in her collections (Interview 1, 2, 3; Cartner-Morely, 2017; The Cut, 2017). As is stated by interviewee 1: “She always shows a message and her strength is that it is not so obvious”. Because of this, fashion editors 1, 3 and 6 state they know they have to search for a meaning because it is always there. This

seems to lead to the notion that Prada's political statement is widely recognized as sincere due to her personal connection with politics and feminism and the structural and subtle use of political messages in her collections.

4.6 Versace

Versace is an Italian fashion house that has been founded in Milan in 1985 by Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace. Due to his sudden passing in 1997, his sister Donatella Versace has been at the helm of the label ever since (Business of Fashion, 2018d). Donatella Versace has proceeded with the original Versace designs and alternated them to modern society, which resulted in the expanding of the business (ibid.). Versace considers itself as one of the leading fashion houses of the world, and has become a symbol for Italian high fashion (Versace, 2018).

4.6.1 The use of a political statement of powerful femininity

Versace showed its Autumn/Winter 2017 collection on the 25th of February 2017 during Milan Fashion Week. The collection presentation took place in a dark location with a minimalist décor, and it would become clear that the runway was used as a political platform to spread a feminist message (Mau, 2017; Harris, 2017). Before the start of the show, a statement of diversity was made. A video was shown with the models that later would walk the show, who spoke about their nationality and their heritage background (Mau, 2017). This message of diversity became also visible on the actual runway, where a diverse group of women walked to a soundtrack that featured the word "Equality" over and over (ibid.). The political statement of diversity is closely linked to the third wave of feminism related to fashion where the embracement of diversity and personality is a central focus point.

During the show models wore black make-up together with bright fluorescent coloured hair, which matched the colours of the clothes. The collection started with dark items, followed by bright and bold coloured styles. Slogans like "Courage", "Love" and "Equality" were intertwined within the collection displayed on hoodies, scarfs, jackets and dresses (Fisher, 2017). During the finale a model wore a white bandana over her wrist, which made a reference to an initiative that was started by the online fashion platform The Business of Fashion, in order to raise awareness for gender equality and to support inclusivity within the fashion industry (Fisher, 2017). It was perceived by magazines that for Versace it was a sexy, yet athletic collection, the latter being a fairly new element for the house (Fisher, 2017; Foley, 2017c). Donatella Versace herself stated that this was a tribute to the strong women, celebrating that women are powerful: "The world is a strange place at the moment" (South

China Morning Post, 2017). “This is a collection about the power of women, and women who know how to use their power. It is a call for unity, and the strength that comes from positivity and hope” (Harris, 2017).

4.6.2 The perception of the political statement

All the interviewed fashion editors agreed upon the notion that Versace is not recognised as a politically engaged fashion house. The aspect that is however connected to the house is their very specific view on women and femininity, with the focus on glamour and sexiness within its designs (Interview 1, 2, 5, 6). This vision strongly relates to the connection of fashion and feminism within the third feminist wave, where the emphasis lies on the opportunity for women to express their individuality and the possibility to use the feeling of sexiness to obtain social and psychological empowerment. These indicators were also present in the analysed collection. At first, the collection is not perceived as very political among the interviewees, whereas all the fashion articles agree upon the fact that this collection obtained a political statement. However, at a certain point some parts of the collection start to resonate to the interviewees, regarding a certain message of women empowerment: “I just don't associate this collection with feminism. But if I think about it, this may be the case for other people who have a different take on femininity” (Interview 2). This view on femininity is explained as courageous, and is according to interviewee 5: “A woman who wears what she wants, is sexy and who *sans gene* wears a min-skirt with sequins to a party”.

In relation to this, the way in which Versace presented this statement is identified as fitting with the DNA of the brand, as stated by interviewee 1 and 6. Regarding the idea that Versace is all about very feminine clothes in a more glamorous way, this collection matches with that vision: “I think that Versace has always thought they empower women, and that they want to emphasise this in regard to the actuality of the issue, and show that they support women's rights” (Interview 6). Concerning the notion that the collection had these specific views on femininity, the women who wear these clothes are considered strong as well: “You have to be a strong woman to dare to wear this” (Interview 1). This makes for the assumption that this collection contains some strong indications to a statement of women empowerment, related to the third wave of feminism, where fashion serves as a tool for personal expression and empowerment. This message also resonated within the choice of models and how they were presented, according to the majority of the interviewees and some articles (Interview 3, 4, 5, 6; Mau, 2017; Foley, 2017). “The models look very strong and look like some kind of warriors” (Interview 3), was an identification that was made that

was also agreed upon by interviewees 5 and 6. Also this is an implicit relation to the connection of fashion and feminism in the way that fashion portrays women as warriors within the third wave of feminism.

The collection of Versace was perceived as a promoter of equality and a celebration of strong woman, with slogans like "Unity", "Love" and "Equality" (Fisher, 2017). The use of this statement regarding women empowerment implied for all the interviewees that without a doubt the collection was a reference to the heated debate regarding women emancipation in the aftermath of the election of Trump. However, the magazine articles do not explicitly make this link to the political event. Overall, there was no doubt for the fashion world that Versace was meaning business with the empowerment of women: "Show-goers weren't left in any doubt that when it comes to banging the drum for feminism, there can be no-one better to lead the march than Donatella" (Harris, 2017). According to interviewee 5, the statement that was made was very clear: "This is very literary about women emancipation". As interviewee 1 and 6 mention, the use of such literally slogans on the clothing are therefore labelled as an efficient method to make a statement visible and recognisable for a large audience. In relation to this, some aspects of the collection were identified by half of the interviewees and one articles as different than a usual Versace collection, with the use of wide shoulders elements, suits and large coats (Interview 1, 5, 6; Harris, 2017). Some items of the collection were described as "fierce black tailoring" and "power dressing" (Harris, 2017). This makes the statement come across as fairly sincere according to interviewee 1: "If she was not at all concerned with this issue, she would have left those texts out and she would not have used the suits either".

Although Versace clearly wanted to make a political statement regarding women emancipation and the empowerment of women, the choice of the use of slogans was not always interpreted as a strong statement. Some interviewees and articles link this method of presenting a political statement to the following of a trend (Interview 1, 3, 4; Foley, 2017c; Truman, 2017). During Paris and New York Fashion Week, other designers used this tactic in their collections, where after also Versace followed in this trend, during the fashion week in Milan. This leads to the perception of these interviewees and articles that the political message within the collection is less sincere and authentic: "If you're going to put it [i.e. the slogans] on a knit hat or nearly naked top, you better get there early. Because fashion's written affirmations are starting to look very familiar" (Foley, 2017c). However, one article that mentioned this trend mechanism did not relate this to a less authentic statement (Truman, 2017). Furthermore, among some fashion journalists the sentiment exists that these literal statements have been added at the very last moment, just to make clear that Versace is

aware about the debate regarding women emancipation (Interview 2, 3, 4). The same interviewees and one magazine indicate that with this notion, the link with the rest of the collection is partly missing (Foley, 2017c).

4.7 Missoni

Missoni is a fashion label that focuses primarily on knitwear. Since its founding in 1953 by husband and wife Tai and Rosita Missoni, the fashion label has become an iconic Italian fashion house and one of the most widely respected ambassadors of Italian fashion around the world (Business of Fashion, 2018f). In 1997 the daughter of the couple, Angela Missoni, took over the role of creative director of the label and is at the helm of the house ever since.

4.7.1 The use of a political statement of women's rights

The examined collection of Missoni for this research is the Autumn/Winter 2017 collection that was presented during Milan Fashion week on February 25th 2017. At the arrival of the collection presentation, the attendees would find pink pussy-hats, pink knitted hats in the shape of cat ears, in the brand's signature zigzag knits on all the seats. This was the same pink symbol that was used as a protest tool in favour of female solidarity during the Women's March in January (Okwodu, 2017). According to the fashion editors and magazines the show presented the typical Missoni items; colourful, knitted items with vivid patterns and layers (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 6; Sortino, 2017; Foley, 2017b). Within the collection, subtle references were made regarding topics such as inclusion and equality. A hand-knitted female symbol was placed on several clothing items, such as big sweaters that were worn as dresses (Phelps, 2017b). In addition, little red hearts were knitted on the front of dresses and cardigans (ibid.).

When the end of the show approached, all the models walked the finale while wearing the same pussy-hats as the audience was given beforehand. Hereafter, Angela Missoni together with her mother Rosita Missoni and the rest of the family team appeared on stage while all wearing the same pussy-hats (Okwodu, 2017). Here Angela Missoni made a statement in a speech, regarding the prevailing political debate around women's rights: "In a time of uncertainty, there is a bond between us that can keep us strong and safe: the bond that unites those that respect the human rights of all. Please join me and my family on this catwalk and let's show the world the fashion community is united and fearless!" (Missoni as cited in Richford, 2017). As agreed by all interviewees and articles, the goal of the collection was linked to the embracement of the power of women and to sustain women in their emancipation: "This collection communicates the femininity of our times, prepared to confront

the conflicts and dilemmas of our contemporary society: the conditions, needs and rights of all women and all minorities” (Foley, 2017b). A part of the proceeds of the collection were donated the American Civil Liberties Union and the United Nations Refugee Agency (Okwodu, 2017).

4.7.2 The perception of the political statement

The fashion house of Missoni is identified by half of the fashion editors as a sympathetic Italian business that represents the concept of family and truly respects the idea of craftsmanship (Interview 1, 3, 4). Missoni is however not perceived as a strong politically engaged fashion house by almost all interviewees (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6). The fashion house is known for its “women friendly” designs, which is identified as inclusive clothing (Interview 1, 5, 6).

The majority of the interviewees and magazine articles perceived the collection as political due to the use of the pussy-hats, a known symbol of the support of women's rights and solidarity during the Women's Marches (Interview 1, 2, 3, 5; Okwodu, 2017; Sortino, 2017; Richford, 2017; McCal, 2017). In general, the choice of the pussy-hats as the visualisation of the political statement is received very positively, especially because they were hand-knitted as well (Interview 1, 2, 3, 5, 6). As stated by interviewee 3: “Knowing this family, everything is probably knitted by women, it is a company that is lead by a women and has a lot of women employees, and this is their only way to show that they care”. Knitwear is within the DNA of the brand, which makes it a perfect match for Missoni according to interviewee 6: “In that respect it fits seamlessly with their clothing, they are the knit label. It just makes sense”. Therefore, the statement is also perceived as true and sincere by almost all interviewees (1, 2, 3, 5, 6) and magazines (Phelps, 2017; Sortino, 2017; McCall, 2017): “This fits so well with the house that it not just feels authentic, but it is authentic” (Interview 3). It is this factor of authenticity that makes the statement comes across as a logical next step for the fashion house.

The statement in the form of the pussy-hat is considered as a real tool to actively empower people to participate in the following Women's Marches, which makes it a useful statement as well according to interviewee 5. With the idea of the Women's March being a real movement, it is argued that the pussy hats could serve as a motivation for the next protests. With this in consideration, the statement seems to be related to the perception of fashion within feminism as a tool for women empowerment. The hats were also perceived by a magazine as a sympathetic tool for the effective female empowerment sentiment: “Missoni kept the can-do spirit of the march alive” (Okwodu, 2017). An important factor that makes the

statement perceived by the fashion editors as sympathetic and sincere is that hats were not used as a commercial sales item (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4). “If they would have sold the hats, then it’s really about something else. But now, the statement really stands for something” (Interview 2). The show of Missoni was also seen as an indicator that the entire international fashion industry, also within Europe, was paying attention to what was happening in the United States (McCall, 2017). The collection was therefore a clear link to the Women's Marches that were a direct result of the political election process within the U.S. and the eventual election of president Trump (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 6; Foley, 2017b; Richford, 2017; McCall, 2017).

Furthermore, the vast majority of the interviewees perceive the statement as an addition to the regular collection and was not identified within the collection as a whole (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 6). For interviewee 4, this perception is linked to the choice of solely presenting the hats in the finale of the show, which indicates that the statement was not meant to be a part of the whole collection, but only for specific occasions such as a demonstration. For her, this made the statement come across as less sincere. The collection contained colourful knitwear that featured no references to the political statement, except for the knitted hearts on the front of dresses that were interpreted as a possible “love letter to breasts as the source of life” (Phelps, 2017b). However, besides these specific items, the clothes didn’t look very politically inspired according to all interviewees and one article (Foley, 2017b). The rest of the articles did not address the relation between the statement and the collection as a whole. According to interviewee 6, the notion that the statement was separately presented from the collection is not necessarily negative: “It was a clear message, which may be separate from their collection, but is part of their vision”. Furthermore, this addition of the political statement to the collection was perceived as empowering in regard to the collection as a whole, as mentioned in a fashion article: “Beautiful clothes are great, but moments like these make them all the greater” (McCall, 2017). The collection was even perceived as the right clothes for a protest march (Phelps, 2017b). The items are identified as a support for the woman of today, who is “emancipated but competitive at the same time” (Sortino, 2017). This collection has also been perceived as one of the strongest visual political statements within fashion regarding women's rights (Okwodu, 2017).

4.8 Discussion of findings: relevant elements in the use and perception of a political statement in fashion

From the analysis it becomes clear that the election process around the new president and the debates around women’s rights and emancipation, provoked visual reactions on the

runways in Paris, New York and Milan. Through the presented results, it was illustrated in what way these political statements were used, and how the fashion editors subsequently perceived them. Within the process of the use and perception of the political statements, five different themes recurred and were very noticeable. These main themes can be identified as elements of how the statements are made and perceived. These elements consist of the following: the difference between an obvious or intrinsic statement, the link between the statement and the entire collection, the extent to which the political statement is perceived as a logical next step for the fashion house, the trend mechanism and finally, the commercial element of the presented political statements. All these elements provide new insights into the existing theories regarding the politics of fashion and the perception of the fashion editors in transferring the meaning of fashion. This takes form in either underpinning, adding or providing nuances within the existing theories. Within this section I will analyse these main elements in regard to the five cases and explain how they contribute to the theoretical debate of the politics of fashion, on the basis of the results from the data analysis.

4.8.1 The obvious versus the intrinsic statement

Within existing literature, the relation between the use and perception of political statements made by fashion houses is greatly underexposed. It is however stated that that political statements in itself can be constituted in many different ways and can cause different reactions by its audience. The analysis provides insights into the manifestation of the political statement within the fashion industry. It became clear that a political statement within fashion first of all is portrayed within the presented collection. Beside this, it can also emerge in the choice of models, who show the collection on the runway, or the location and decor of the show. In addition, the statement can be carried out within the whole business structure, which makes the statement more profound.

Furthermore, an important nuance can be added regarding the portrayal and the use of the statement within the collections. This is the division between the obvious statement and the intrinsic statement. Obvious statements are generally directly notable, whereas intrinsic statements are more difficult to visually identify. Both kinds have pros en cons in the use and perception. Regarding the perception of the fashion editors, the intrinsic method is generally perceived as more relevant and sincere in comparison to the obvious statements. This influences the way in which fashion intermediaries subsequently portray and transfer the statement to the audience. However, it is undeniably clear that the obvious method of presenting a statement has the advantage of reaching a large audience, which makes the potential impact of underlying message of the statement potentially bigger. The theory of

Johnson and Judd (1983) states that political statements are impactful, when either matching or extremely contrasting with the beliefs of the perceiver. With the gathered information about the manifestations of political statements within fashion, a nuance should be added to this theory. From the data analysis it became clear that in general the fashion editors all believed in the positive effect of a political statement supporting women's rights and emancipation. According to the theory of Johnson and Judd this should imply that all the statements made by the five fashion houses should be perceived as impactful and meaningful. This is partly the case, since all the statements were regarded as an impactful message.

However, the concept of sincerity is relevant here, and plays an important role for the perception of the statements. From the cases of the five different fashion houses it became clear that Dior, Prabal Gurung and Missoni presented their statement in a more obvious way, Prada chose to present in more intrinsically linked within the whole of the collection, and Versace was somewhere in the middle with the use of obvious slogans and implicit references in the clothing. Fashion houses as Prabal Gurung and Dior portrayed a similar political message as the other fashion houses, but were overall however not perceived as sincere statements. Although two different interviewees perceived the statements of the two fashion houses as sincere; the rest was not convinced of this. The fashion magazines reported mostly objectively regarding the political statements in the collections, although some of them criticized the sincerity as well. Despite the notion that some items in the collection were perceived as a good translation of the statement, such as the use of flat shoes and comfortable clothing items, this did not influence the overall impression of the journalists. This illustrates that a political statement that is completely in line with the vision of the fashion editors, eventually can be identified as insincere and meaningless. The important addition to the theory within the context of the fashion industry is that political statements that are presented in an obvious way, experience less sincere perception than statements that are portrayed in an intrinsic way, regardless of the intended political message. This division in the use of a political statement is of huge impact for the eventual perception of the statement by the fashion intermediaries, and therefore the eventual meaning that is given to the statement by the wider public.

4.8.2 Link to the entire collection

In addition to the obvious versus the intrinsic use of a political statement within a collection, comes the relevance of the link that is made to the entire collection. As seen within the analysis, fashion houses can choose to add a statement within certain looks or at the finale of a show, or can portray the statement within the collection as a whole. From the analysis it

became clear that Prada was perceived as one of the most sincere statements, which was identified as most relevant within the fashion industry. In general, a presented political statement is regarded more sincere and meaningful when entirely intertwined in the whole collection. The separation between the political statement and the actual clothes is generally perceived as misstep. This became slightly visible at Missoni and Versace but foremost with Dior and Prabal Gurung. Because of the use of an obvious statement presented on one or certain items, with few to no alternations within the entire collection, these fashion houses did not portray a strong and sincere statement according to the majority of the fashion intermediaries. It was identified as an empty and easy statement that reduces the relevance of such design within the fashion industry. As a result, this is subsequently perceived as an insincere statement, which has a direct influence on the way these statements are transferred to and perceived by the audience. This illustrates that in these cases there exists a connection between the kind of statement and the link to the collection. The intrinsic statements are linked to the collection as a whole, where the obvious statements often lack connection with the rest of the presented styles. A theoretical indication is therefore that the perception of a statement is strongly linked to the way the statement is integrated within the entire collection.

4.8.3 Political statement as a logical next step

Within the theoretical framework it already became clear that the field of fashion is inseparably linked to its political context and that it became increasingly visible that fashion houses were making political statements on the runways (Binkley, 2017; Lang, 2017). With the notion of the abovementioned information regarding the division between the obvious and the intrinsic statement, another factor contributes to the deeper insights into the way political statements are perceived within the fashion industry. Here the element of the extent to which a statement is a seemingly logical next step that matches with the previous work of the fashion house, plays an important role. A very notable example is the case of Prada, which was generally perceived as a meaningful statement. This was partly the case because Prada was identified as a structural politically engaged fashion house that has presented politically loaded messages in the past. The same goes for Versace. Although the collection presented obvious political statements that were not totally connected to the entire collection, the alternations that were made were perceived as a logical result that fitted with the DNA of the brand. However, the most striking example has been Missoni. This fashion house made use of one of the most obvious and literal statements in the form of hand-knitted pussy-hats as a reference to the Women's March. Because the house used an iconic part of their DNA,

namely knits, the statement was generally perceived as a logical result for the fashion house to show their engagement, and was therefore perceived as sincere and authentic. This idea of the statement being a logical result for the fashion house is therefore a very important element within the perception of a statement by fashion editors.

4.8.4 Trend mechanism

The existing theories of Paulicelli (as cited in Cugini, 2016) and Navarro-Delgado (2018) have shown that fashion is becoming increasingly political, especially over the last two years. It was stated that the fashion shows during Fashion Week could be viewed as platforms that were used to spread and present this message. Here, it was put into question to what extent these presented statements are meaningful and sincere, because it seemed that political statements were becoming an obligated marketing tool that eventually became a trend (Cugini, 2016; Navarro-Delgado, 2018).

This theory is underpinned within this research through the analysis. Fashion houses such as Versace and Prabal Gurung were approached negatively for their use of slogans as the method to portray their statement. The use of slogans on clothing was already presented earlier, with the Spring 2017 collection of Dior as the most striking example. Only a few months after the show, Prabal Gurung presented the same concept at New York Fashion Week, where after also Versace presented it during Milan Fashion Week. The statements made by Gurung and Versace were therefore strongly identified as the following of a trend. This does not mean that fashion cannot be identified as a vehicle for socialisation and liberation from cultural constraints, as Crane and Bovone (2006) have stated. Versace and Prabal Gurung can challenge the belief systems around a topic such as feminism, but it is questionable whether this is really the reason that such items were eventually presented. This subsequently relates to the question whether such politically loaded slogan T-shirts are consumed as a result of affinity with the intended message of feminism, or simply because it is a fashionable and trendy item. What can be added as a new theoretical insight is that such assumptions can cause that a statement is perceived as less meaningful and sincere. This is in line with the authenticity question regarding the used statement. This indicates also a paradox, related to the conviction that fashion is all about following trends. However, the fashion houses that do this within their statements in a more sincere and intrinsic way are regarded more positively as a substantive statement.

4.8.5 The commercial element

Although the statement has been made that fashion is becoming increasingly context-related rather than object centred (Breward, 2007), and that goods are now considerably more about meaning than functionality (Godard and Mears, 2009), the object or good itself remains a very important part of the industry. A very important nuance that has to be added in these theories is the commercial element related to the use of a political statement within the fashion industry. This became strikingly visible within the case of Missoni. Missoni had a lot of the same factors that constituted the political statement as houses like Dior and Prabal Gurung. However, in general, the statement of Missoni was not perceived the same way. In fact, Missoni's statement was perceived as a sincere statement, although the only visible reference to the statement they presented were the Missoni style, hand-knitted pussy-hats. The important difference between these three houses is that Missoni did not use the item for commercial sales purposes. For the fashion intermediaries this indicates that the intended statement is truly meaningful and not an easy statement or the following of a trend in order to gain publicity. This was however the case with Dior and Prabal Gurung, where it was called into question whether a feminist slogan shirt really should cost that amount of money and put into sale.

In addition, Mears (2011) argued that there exists a strict division between commercial fashion and high fashion, where within the former the goal of fashion primarily is to sell clothes, and within the latter the commercial element is less explicitly a part of the business model and the focus lies more on the portrayal of symbolic meanings within an idealistic world. Within high fashion there exist a far stronger social division between the producer and the consumer than is the case for commercial fashion. However, the relation between producer and consumer always exists within the fashion industry. From this research it appears however that in some cases this division between the two fields is blurred. The cases of Versace but foremost Dior and Prabal Gurung illustrated that there existed a close link to a commercial aspect through the use of the slogan T-shirts and their commercial sales purpose. These obvious statements regarding feminism were an instant Instagram hit, and became very popular items to consume. This is in line with the idea of Crane and Bovone (2006), who state that the process of creating symbolic values within fashion is closely linked to the will to satisfy the target audience. The important note that Mears (2011) makes here is that this should not be the main part within high fashion, due to the larger social distance between producer and consumer. Here, high fashion is located within a tension field of both producing aesthetics, meaningful fashion and at the same time

need to fulfil certain commercial sale purposes. Mears states that high fashion attempts to draw boundaries towards commercialisation.

The results that derived from this research are in line with the theory Mears proposes. It became clear that fashion houses as Dior and Prabal Gurung are critiqued by the intermediaries for being too commercial within their high fashion designs that portray a political statement. It becomes visible that the commercial element is at the expense of the perception of the meaningfulness of a made statement. This implies that a certain boundary towards the commercial element is indeed of great importance within the field of high fashion. This furthermore implies the observation that the intended political message becomes of secondary importance in relation to the commercial element. This element trumps the fact whether the political statement itself is perceived as strong. A larger question that derives from this is whether it is possible for something political within fashion to be commercial at the same time, without losing its intended symbolic meaning and authenticity. This research makes the beginning mark on this idea, stating that this relation strongly depends on factors such as the level of intrinsicness and integration with the collection as a whole.

5. Conclusions

Within this research I have showed that fashion has a contextual meaning. Fashion is linked to different social processes, carries out symbolic meanings and is linked with its political context. The connection between fashion and the political context was the main theme of this research, where the meaning of fashion was examined within the use and perception of political statements. The election process and the eventual election of president Donald Trump served as the political context in which the researched cases were examined. A specific political debate that was striking in this period was linked to women's rights and emancipation. This resulted in visible political statements by different fashion houses. In addition to this, fashion intermediaries are the ones that give actual meaning through the decoding of these messages and present this perception to the wider public. Therefore the following research question has been examined: *'In what ways did fashion editors perceive the use of political statements by fashion houses regarding women's rights and emancipation during and after the election process of president Donald Trump?'*

To be able to answer this question I went through several stages. In the literature review it became clear that fashion houses were using political statements in their collections, but not in what ways and how it subsequently is perceived and given meaning to. Through the use of both methods of qualitative interviewing and qualitative content analysis the collected data was analysed, where it became clear that fashion is indeed inseparably linked to the political context, and produces symbolic meanings through the presentation of a collection. All different fashion houses presented a collection that in a certain way portrayed a political statement linked to the feminist debates of women's rights and emancipation. The analysis of the use and the perception of the made political statements resulted in several new insights into the existing theory of the politics of fashion.

This research has contributed to understandings on how these statements are portrayed and how the fashion intermediaries subsequently perceive them. This is an important connection, considering that the fashion editors are the actors that give meaning to the statement and transmit this to the wider audience. Furthermore five relevant elements were discovered that shape the way political statements regarding feminism, specifically related to women's rights and emancipation, are used by fashion houses and perceived by fashion editors. These five elements provide the answer to the posed research question, because they construct the way fashion editors perceive the use of political statements in fashion regarding women's rights and emancipation. From the analysis of the political statements it became clear that it is relevant to distinguish between obvious and intrinsic statements. The former became visible in the cases of Dior, Prabal Gurung and Missoni and

the latter was present within the collection of Prada. Versace was somewhere in the middle by using aspects of both forms. This research proves that obvious statements are often perceived as less sincere and authentic in comparison to intrinsic statements. This is due to the notion that an obvious statement is often identified as an easy and meaningless statement. With this comes the relevant element of the link to the collection as a whole. If absent, the statement was often perceived as insincere. Regularly, the obvious statements were missing this link, where in the case of the perception of the intrinsic statements the relation to the rest of the collection was indeed made. A third relevant element that occurred was the question whether the statement was perceived as a logical next step for the fashion house in question. This resulted in the perception that if the statement matched with the DNA of the brand, the statement was perceived as authentic and meaningful. With this comes a fourth element that is linked to the trend mechanism. Through this research it is stated that when a political statement is perceived as purely the result of a trend, it is perceived as less sincere and meaningful. This is due to the idea that the made statement loses authenticity and provides no relevant addition to the fashion industry because it reproduces something that has already been done before. The final identified relevant element is linked to the commercial aspect. This element indicates that whether a statement has commercial purposes related to sales, besides its symbolic meaning, it loses sincerity and authenticity. This research illustrated that high fashion indeed needs to respect the boundary of the commercial element, for not losing the meaningfulness and authenticity within a political statement through the perception of the intermediaries.

This research has been carried out on a qualitative base. This leads to certain implications for this research. Underlying meanings and processes of the studied phenomenon have been clarified, yet the results and findings cannot be generalized to the fashion industry as a whole due to the limited number of studied cases, interviews and articles. Therefore, it would be highly relevant for future research to focus on the quantitative method relating to the topic of the politics of fashion in order to discover whether the made claims within this research are applicable to a more general level within the fashion industry as a whole. In addition, the political statements made by the fashion houses are presented to the wider public during collection presentations, but were in this research only analysed within the perception of the intermediaries. A wider question that derives from this is how this wider audience perceives these statements and what the eventual impact is. As was stated in the research, the impact of such made statements can have large implications for the general awareness of women's rights and feminism. It would therefore be highly significant to examine in what ways these statements have had an actual impact on the public, and

furthermore if the five relevant elements for the perception of the statements on feminism and women's rights are applicable to the shaping of their perception as well. In relation to these five discovered elements on the perception of political statements regarding women emancipation and feminism, the question derives whether these elements are also applicable to other political topics within the fashion industry. This could be examined within other prevailing political questions in the fashion industry, regarding topics such as sustainability and social corporate responsibility.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Articles content analysis

Dior

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7.2 Interview guide

General meaning of Fashion

- What made you interested in fashion?
- How would you define the concept of fashion?

Fashion in relation to politics

- What is your own relation to politics? – Are you a political person? – What do you think about women's rights and emancipation in the current context?
- According to you how is fashion related to the political context?
- What do you consider to be a political statement within the fashion world?
- How does the political aspect designed by a fashion house manifest itself in a certain collection?

Specific cases: Dior/ Versace/ Prada/ Prabal Gurung/ Missoni

- How do you associate this fashion house with politics?

Images of specific collection of all fashion houses

- Do you recognize a political statement regarding women's rights in this specific collection? In what way? – What do you think is the strategy?
- What is the political message regarding the topic of women's rights of this collection according to you?
- To what extent do you think these political statements are a direct reference to the issues around women's rights regarding the election of president Donald Trump?

Images of Collections

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7.3 Interview transcripts

In separate file.