

## FASHION EXHIBITIONS: INTERMEDIARIES BETWEEN MUSEUM AND TOURISM

<sup>1</sup>DAN JASON CALINAO, <sup>2</sup>LIN, HUI-WEN

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. student, Institute of Creative Industries Design, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan R.O.C.

<sup>2</sup>Assoc. Prof., Institute of Creative Industries Design, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan R.O.C.

E-mail: [1djcalinao@gmail.com](mailto:djcalinao@gmail.com), [2hwlin@mail.ncku.edu.tw](mailto:hwlin@mail.ncku.edu.tw)

### ABSTRACT

*From the recent proliferation of fashion exhibitions in museums around the world, two exhibitions in renowned museums in the United Kingdom that featured creations of an acclaimed British designer and Scottish knitwear company prompted an interest on finding out how these and other cultural institutions that occasionally hold these types of temporary events consider the potential of fashion exhibitions as strategies to entice tourist interest within and beyond the local setting. The museums where these exhibitions were held carry significant names, eliciting inquiry as to how conceptualized strategies can serve as an effective model that can be adopted by other museums when devising strategies for tourism attraction without reliance to popularity. Asynchronous interviews with the V&A research exhibition assistant and the curator at the National Museum of Scotland were conducted. Findings suggest that other museums can regard the following strategies for tourism attraction: 1. Link exhibition features with location. 2. Reinforce fashion as a museum staple, 3. Various themes for fashion exhibitions, 4. Relate fashion exhibitions to tourism. Although the National Museum of Scotland and the V&A are institutions that are already well-grounded as tourist attractions, fashion exhibitions can serve as instruments in generating tourism in the contemporary setting where novelty is sought.*

**Keywords:** *Fashion, museum, exhibition, tourism, tourism strategy*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Museums are constantly faced with the challenge to increase visitors (Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler, 2008; Sol, 2006). With this challenge entails devising strategies to attract visitors, and variety of strategies are conceptualized based on evaluation of visitation selection (Burton, Louviere, and Young, 2008), visitor perceptions, (Jun, Kyle, and O'Leary, 2006), visitor insights (Moscardo, 1996), satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Nowacki, 2009), and sustained visitor/museum relationship (Barrett and Everett, 2009). Museums not only need to rely on local visitors to increase museum attendance, but also attracting visitors from international regions is deemed important.

The frequent presentation of fashion exhibitions by museums has been observed in recent years, prompting for an investigation as to how these types of events are able to attract museum visitors who are considered as tourists. Most often, fashion exhibitions are attractive to visitors who may have an interest in fashion,

whether exhibitions feature items of historical or cultural significance, creations of famous designers, famous brands, or those that simply use fashion as a special theme. The variety of fashion exhibitions presented by museums suggests a possible extensive number of visitors who attend these exhibitions, whether those who reside within the museum's proximity or a percentage of visitors hailing from the other locations. Also, for museums to increase visitor number there is a need to identify attributes of fashion exhibitions in order to draw out strategies that may contribute to attracting visitors that include tourists.

Two fashion-related exhibitions held simultaneously at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh entitled *Fully Fashioned: The Pringle of Scotland Story* that featured the country's famous knitwear brand, and the Victoria and Albert Museum (hereafter the V&A) in London that showcased the creations of a famous late designer, Alexander McQueen in their exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* differ by several factors

from the exhibition scale and popularity to the prominence of the museums where they were held.

With these differences and other factors such as museum objectives, it is of interest to find out how such types of exhibitions are able to draw in visitors, particularly tourists. The popularity of London and Edinburgh as cities rich in history, culture and heritage may be considered sufficient in enticing tourists either local or international. Both the National Museum of Scotland and the V&A possess heritage value as being listed with categories I and A, with national or international importance, and with architectural and historical interest. These values may add to the museums' attraction, thereby also adding interest to museums goers before or after visit. However, reliance to these attributes is not guaranteed to continually bring in tourism, especially if these cities will find a need to highlight the significance of museums and exhibitions in devising future plans to attract additional and repeat visitors. This study therefore sought to find out what feature/s of fashion exhibitions can interest tourists, how museums see the significance of fashion for their institution considering their plans for future exhibitions, and how museums instate fashion exhibitions in the tourism context, wherein findings can be developed into strategies for museums to utilize fashion exhibitions as means to generate visitors.

The present study intends to provide significant contribution to future research on generating and developing tourism strategies. However, with a general identification given to tourism, no specific form of tourism such as leisure or niche tourism is being focused on. It is also essential to mention that tourism in this study does not encompass nor centers only on a specific type or group of tourists. Tourism attraction potentials of fashion exhibitions are investigated under the museum perspective, thereby restricting the issue on museum visitors as only the tourists. These visitors as tourists may later on be identified and segmented in detail in future research concerning the differences of the form of tourism where they can be classified according to the purpose of their travel, such as visiting museums as a leisure activity (Dean, 1994). Also, tourism visitation selection and decision may be affected by variables such as exhibition ticket price and other costs incurred, for which alternatives for tourists to spend their money on while traveling may be opted.

This research centers on fashion in the context of tourism through their inclusion in museums, thus differentiating its purpose, but not separating, from

investigations directed on fashion tourism. Fashion tourism is defined as the phenomenon where by 'people travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment to enjoy experience and possibly consume fashion' (Bada, 2013). The visiting of cities or capitals that are known for fashion, namely Paris, London, New York, or Milan, enhances tourism experience. Fashion as an industry is rooted in these locations, and activities such as fashion weeks, trade shows and personal shopping by visitors magnify the reputation of these locations as tourist destinations. While the current study focuses on exhibitions in museums, findings may bring about implications for tourism in the cultural arena, and not on the industry locus. However, as industry suggests, tourism as an industry may be boosted by events such as fashion exhibitions, and eventually give a positive impact to a location in terms of economic contribution through visitation and visitor increase.

The significance of the National Museum of Scotland and the V&A in generating international tourism is already sufficed by the status of these museums as institutions that are not only part of the UK's history but also disseminators of its culture. Since these museums are well grounded as tourist attractions, it is of interest to find out how these museums can utilize their exhibitions, and the exhibitions themselves alone, for tourism generation without solely relying on museum's name. Consequently, other museums that do not resemble or are lesser known than the National Museum of Scotland and the V&A may look up to these institutions when it comes to formulating strategies for increasing visitor attendance.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **1 MUSEUMS, TOURISM AND FASHION**

#### **1.1 Museums and Their Collections and Exhibitions as Tourist Attractions**

Previous studies have evaluated the value of museums as tourist attractions and the relationship between museums and tourism (Nowacki, 2007; Harrison, 1997; Jansen-Verbeke and van Rekom 1996; Graburn, 1977), wherein their qualities for attraction are attributed to diverse factors such as architecture (Plaza, 2000a, 2000b; Milne and Tufts 1999), location (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), history and culture (Munsters and Richards, 2010), and heritage (Park, 2014; Chhabra, 2010; Prentice et al. 2007; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995;). Milne

and Tufts (1999) also argue that museums function as tourist attractions due to their ability to reflect an essential sense of a particular time and place that are unavailable elsewhere, helping define an overall tourism product. While museums themselves are considered as attractions of a place through the attributes previously mentioned, museums also attempt to generate visits by devising goals that stresses the role of their permanent collections and timely exhibitions on attracting visitors (Munsters and Richards, 2010). Collections are considered special among museums in such a way that they are either exclusively housed in their institutions, or the range and vastness of the collection amassed throughout time makes it impressive and worth seeing. Tourists, especially from the international setting, are enticed to see these collections that cannot be seen elsewhere. As for local tourists, the permanent availability of these collections for them to see anytime allows them to likely become repeat visitors. On the other hand, timely exhibitions generate interest for both potential and repeat visitors, as they become attracted by the exhibitions for their special themes or featured pieces (Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler 2008). A variety of special or themed temporary exhibitions allows for the visitation to the museum of a multitude of groups of visitors with differing interest.

## 1.2 Museum Strategies to Increase Visitation

Museums need to come up with strategies not only in maintaining visitor attendance, but also increasing them (Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler, 2008). A number of strategies have been formulated by these institutions, which range from developing blockbuster exhibitions (Bradburne, 2001) to promoting education and learning (Falk et al, 1998). Visitation may depend on what objective the museum aims to center on in order to increase its visit. The attainment of these objectives is mostly materialized in exhibitions, as exhibitions contain a multitude of topics, and the interpretation of exhibition objects is not restricted to subjectivity. Other objectives look into historical or cultural importance of the museum both as physical and symbolic. The museum's architectural design offers as an attraction and contributes to a location's representational quality (Plaza, 2000). A focus on one aspect of the museum, whether its educational offering or physical attribute, impacts the museum as a whole. Therefore, to come up with strategies to increase visitation, museums need to look at a larger and more complex picture. While permanent collections of museums are made available for the general public to see at any time, the content of

these collections may not be a guarantee to increase visitors, especially when the significance of the collections are centered only a narrow subject. Another problem is location. Potential visitors may opt not to visit a museum if they are situated in places that are not easily accessed. Unless museums are able to link themselves to special attributes that the location offers to visitors particularly tourists, then the museum becomes an additional destination. Tourists who have the interest to visit a location may add in their itinerary to visit the museum and eventually the exhibitions.

## 2 LOOKING AT FASHION EXHIBITIONS IN MUSEUMS FROM A TOURISM PERSPECTIVE

Fashion has been the subject of research in terms of their significance in history, culture, identity, and status (Lillethun and Welters, 2011; Clark and Paulicelli, 2009; Corrigan, 2008; English, 2007; Brydon and Niessen, 1998) as reflected in interpreted artifacts in museums such as period clothing (Steele, 2008). Melchior (2011) argues that fashion can be a means to make a museum appear relevant, appealing to broader visitor groups from the contemporary society. Exhibition concepts that use fashion allow visitors who are interested in the said topic to visit the institution. However, these museums still need to interpret fashion items under subjects of history, anthropology, culture, or sociology in order to ensure of its cogent placement together with related artifacts that are housed and displayed in an educational institution. A general topic of fashion can be interesting for tourists; however, their purpose for visiting a place may depend on a certain subject of interest, in which the museum places fashion in, thereby enabling fashion to be appreciated by tourists according to their purpose of travel.

With regards to fashion exhibitions, these exhibitions can be conceptualized based on themes that link fashion to a location (Melchior and Svensson, 2014). The connection between fashion exhibitions and the city or location can be observed in special exhibitions such as *Global Fashion Capitals* held at the FIT Museum in New York in 2015, which explored on the history of the established fashion capitals such Paris, New York, Milan, and London, and the emergence of new fashion cities. All the featured cities are home to forward-thinking designers who have achieved domestic success and attracted international interest. The exhibition was organized to show a city's cultural identity and particular economic,

political, and social circumstances that helped elevate designers to international attention. These cities also hold fashion weeks attended by international press and fashion buyers. The branding of these cities as capitals of fashion adds to their attractive quality especially where the fashion industry is very much apparent. Tourists become interested in these locations due to fashion's impact on their brand and reputation. This feature is transformed into a niche type of tourism, which is called fashion tourism. Not all fashion exhibitions can have the capability to immediately link themselves with cities such as the special exhibition previously mentioned, nor with tourism. However, fashion exhibitions like *Global Fashion Capitals* may be conceptualized in order to recognize some aspect of fashion or its constituents that can contribute to a location's identity such as a city, thereby drawing visitors and making it as a potential tourist attraction.

Several museums around the world either specialize or hold temporary exhibitions on fashion. Museums such as Mode Museum in Antwerp, Musee Galliera in Paris, Museo del Traje in Madrid, and Fashion Museum in Bath all concentrate on fashion and hold both permanent and special exhibitions. The V&A in London has a permanent fashion and textiles department and held temporary exhibitions including *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957* in 2007 and *Ballgowns: British Glamour since 1950* in 2012. Such specialization in fashion gives these museums exclusivity on showcasing their own fashion collections that are distinct from other museums, and help them become identifiable. Although the cities where they are situated are considered tourist destinations, the exclusivity and distinction of specialization of fashion museums and the unique fashion exhibitions they hold may generate interest for tourists to see more of what the place has to offer beyond conventional attractions and attractiveness.

Overall, the capability of fashion exhibitions in contributing to the generation of tourism calls for further investigation. Fashion exhibitions can be developed by museums into strategies that not only attract audience for their institutions but also tourists who may be interested to visit the locations where their museums are situated. Museums may also need to evaluate the significance of fashion exhibitions from temporary special exhibitions to permanent collections as potential instruments for tourism attraction. The issue for museums to generate audience is not limited to local scope, thus

the possibility of extending beyond the usual setting in order to increase visitor number is deemed essential.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Data collection was gathered through asynchronous interviews via email correspondence with the curator of modern and contemporary fashion and textiles at the art and design department of the National Museum of Scotland to inquire on their exhibition *Fully Fashioned: The Pringle of Scotland Story*, and the senior exhibition research assistant at the research department of the V&A Museum for the exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. Questions asked concentrated on eliciting responses concerning museum objectives, exhibition purpose, visitor interest, and tourism. The selection of these two exhibitions for investigation is prompted by their timeliness – being held simultaneously and in two separate cities but belonging to one specific location, which is the United Kingdom. Both exhibitions are different from each to other by scale, concept, featured pieces, and the specialization of the institution responsible for these events. However, the presence of the museums and exhibitions in one country suggests that the factors derived from the present study may contribute to the tourism for that particular location, emphasizing on the salient features of fashion exhibitions that may differentiate their tourism attributes with fashion exhibitions in other locations.

### 4. CONCEPTUALIZED STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM ATTRACTION THROUGH FASHION EXHIBITIONS

This section discusses and elaborates on findings from the interviewees' responses to the questions given that had sought answers that regarded the museums' aim of featuring the fashion-related exhibitions selected in this study to the exhibitions' potential to attract tourists. Four strategies are derived basing from the factors emphasized from the interview.



**1 LINK EXHIBITION FEATURES WITH THE LOCATION**

Table 1. The V&A on Exhibition Details (on Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty)

Exhibition feature	Emphasis
- Remarkable talent of Alexander McQueen	Designer reputation
- One of the most innovative designers of his generation (McQueen)	
- consistently pushed the boundaries of fashion with his radical and fearless visions	
- Exhibition serves as 'homecoming' for McQueen after exhibition at MoMA in New York	Designer origin

Table 2. The National Museum of Scotland on Exhibition Details (on Fully Fashioned: The Pringle of Scotland Story)

Exhibition feature	Emphasis
- 200 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the company	Brand history
- Traces the company's heritage and its evolution from a small hosiery firm to an international fashion knitwear brand	
- Demonstrates the continuing relevance of knitwear to the modern wardrobe	Brand heritage

The Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty exhibition at the V&A in London showcased the late designer's remarkable talent as reflected in his creations. McQueen became a huge interest and asset in the fashion world for his distinctiveness, unique concepts and forward thinking, which led to his labeling as a visionary. The designer's talent was much attributed to his experience and learning in London. The city where he grew up not only became his source of inspiration but also a place where he honed his skills in tailoring and design. The posthumous exhibition, which was initially held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, prompted for its rightful return to London where McQueen both as designer and brand were established (Table 1). The holding of the Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty exhibition in London suggests a reinforcement to the city not only as an established fashion capital but also as a place where events such as fashion exhibitions commemorating

designers are held in order to make the city become more known for fashion as a source of creative ideas and as a creative output.

The National Museum of Scotland's purpose of holding the exhibition *Fully Fashioned: The Pringle of Scotland Story* was to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pringle of Scotland, which is the company that pioneered on knitwear. The exhibition featured the company's evolution from a small firm to a world-renown fashion brand, and showed how the knitwear developed from its early form to contemporary garments that were added with sophistication by design and technological interventions. With the emphasis on the company's anniversary, the museum highlights Pringle of Scotland's history and heritage (Table 2), thereby suggesting not only the contribution of the fashion company towards its own reputation as a brand but also towards Scotland's industry. Such contribution allows the recognition of Scotland as the birthplace of one of the iconic brands in fashion and as the establishment of the knitwear that holds a significant role in fashion as products that were invented, produced, and later on designed for fashion seasons and future trends.

**2 REINFORCE FASHION AS MUSEUM STAPLE**

Table 3. The National Museum of Scotland on Plans to Hold Future Fashion-Related Exhibitions

Museum's future plan	Emphasis
- Make fashion a firm fixture on the exhibitions programme by having a permanent fashion gallery	Fashion's inclusion in the museum

Although the V&A is already known as the world's greatest museum in decorative arts and the exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* had successfully attracted a total number of 493,043 visitors from both the UK and overseas, thereby noting it as one of the most visited exhibitions throughout museum history, the extensive and permanent collection in its fashion and textiles department adds to the V&A's popularity. With the National Museum of Scotland's plan to have a permanent fashion gallery, fashion's inclusion as a permanent fixture in their institution (Table 3) may also have the tourism benefits similar to that which can be yielded at the V&A. As a new addition to the National Museum of Scotland's collections, the fashion gallery may help generate and regenerate interest to international and local tourists because of their lasting and continuing display that tourists can

see at any time. The V&A and the National Museum of Scotland having permanent galleries dedicated to fashion allows many visitors to appreciate fashion under a multitude of topics ranging from historical developments as observed in material usage and design improvements, to cultural implications such as luxury and self-expression. Fashion serves as a possible catalyst to tourism because of the fashion collection's wide range of objects and themes that can create diverse interest for different types of tourists.

### 3 FASHION EXHIBITIONS WITH A VARIETY OF THEMES

Table 4. The National Museum of Scotland on Fashion Exhibitions

Interest to visitors	Emphasis
- Tend to be very popular; A draw for crowds	
- Helps to bring fashion to new audiences	
- As we all wear clothes, it is something we can all relate to on some level	Appeal to a large number of diverse audience
- Visitors interested in the celebrity or designer clothing, the history of fashion, or the design and construction of clothing	

As the V&A has an established reputation for consistently delivering world-class exhibitions and housing a large collection of fashion-related objects from clothing to accessories, the National Museum of Scotland addresses its own perspective on fashion exhibitions' appeal to attract visitors to their museum. As responses given in Table 4 indicate, the frequency of fashion exhibitions held in museums around the world suggests the popularity of these types of exhibitions, thereby attracting both repeat and new audiences. Fashion exhibitions can attract visitors because of their capability to enable people recognize the exhibition objects such as clothes, as physical necessities or consumables, thereby becoming relatable because of their integral value to daily life. Whether these clothes bear some historical or cultural characteristic, are labeled with designer or brand names, or become special objects for their design, or having been worn by famous individuals, objects in fashion exhibitions depending on conceptualized theme are reflective of how society especially in the modern context has evolved through the development of fashion, and vice versa.

Fashion can also be related to a multitude of aspects such as society (Bradburne, 2001), history,

designer clothing, or design itself, and they tend to aid fashion to extend its reach to new audiences including diverse tourists whose interests on fashion can be sufficed by different-themed fashion exhibitions. Although several given factors are occasionally attributed to the impact of mass media or popular culture, such as those that spotlight fashion brands being endorsed by celebrities (Kim, Lee, and Scott, 2008), the main interest lies in the clothing as museum artifact.

### 4 RELATE FASHION EXHIBITIONS TO TOURISM

Table 5. The V&A on Fashion Exhibition's Impact on Tourism

Role in tourism	Emphasis
- Fashion exhibitions programme attracts a large number of overseas visitors	
- A large proportion of visitors travel from Europe and the US (West)	Strong appeal to international tourists
- Tourists travelled from 87 countries to visit our current blockbuster exhibition Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty	

Table 6. National Museum of Scotland on Fashion Exhibition's Impact on Tourism

Role in tourism	Emphasis
- Fashion can often be centered around major cities, such as London, Paris, and New York, thereby generating interest to visit these locations	Fashion capitals as tourist destinations
- Hopefully encourage London-based visitors to come further North of UK, so visitors can experience the cultural attractions Scottish cities have to offer	Local attractions as derivatives upon visit to fashion exhibitions

With both the National Museum of Scotland and the V&A attesting to the positive impact of fashion exhibitions in tourism for their popularity that has been generated by the many characteristics of fashion, museums can thus give importance to fashion exhibition's role in tourism attraction. The popularity of the fashion exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the V&A, as demonstrated by the previously mentioned number of tourists who visited the event especially those who come from international locations (Table 5),

grants the exhibition as a world-class exhibition, augmenting V&A's reputation as a museum that delivers distinguishing events. The effect of this phenomenon may also be extended beyond the museum's recognition. As fashion can also be linked to cities branded as fashion capitals (Table 6), fashion exhibitions can also remind tourists of the impact that fashion has given to the reputation of cities as places popularized by fashion from industry to culture, especially where their museums and the fashion exhibitions are held. Consequently, tourists may be interested to visit fashion capitals for future travel plans. Tourists may also consider experiencing other cultural attractions where the museums where the fashion exhibitions they have visited are situated.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study sought to investigate the potential role of fashion exhibitions as strategies for tourism by taking the case of two fashion exhibitions that were simultaneously held in the UK. Findings suggest that museums may plan to hold fashion exhibitions as a means to generate tourism, in which the significant features of conceptualized exhibitions such as those that emphasize designer or company reputation and their relation to the location where their brands were established can be highlighted. With regards to fashion's inclusion in the museum, museums can emphasize the importance of the permanence of fashion in their collections, as having a permanent fashion gallery can offer a wide range of objects and themes that can create diverse interest for different types of tourists who can see them at any time they wish to visit. Due to the success of *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the V&A for attracting a great number of tourists especially those who come from abroad, other museums can mirror V&A's capability of attracting audience beyond geographical limits by holding fashion exhibitions that are attractive not only to locals but also international enthusiasts. The impact that these fashion exhibitions have for the museums where they are held may be expanded to the location where the museums are situated, thereby allowing visitors who see these exhibitions to become interested in seeing other attractions in the locality, consequently augmenting to its cultural tourism.

Museums other than the National Museum of Scotland and the V&A may wish to consider the significance of fashion exhibitions as means to attract tourists. As one of the museums' objectives

is to generate audience, fashion exhibitions can help generate visitors beyond their locality, and can also act as a "medium" for tourism by making tourists become interested to know more about the location where the museums are situated. Museums can also come up with exhibitions that signify a relationship between society and the artifacts, building a bridge so visitors are able to relate in certain aspects how these artifacts shaped society in a certain way and point in time (Bradburne, 2001).

Lysikova (2012) claimed that fashion can contribute to the 'prestige of a destination', but this may not only be due to the niche of fashion tourism that is appreciated by the experience achieved from retail shopping or fashion brand attractiveness (Choi, 2014) that results to purchase and consumption. As retail can contribute to tourism through the attraction of shopping centers (McIntyre, 2012), the reputation of the locations such as fashion capitals differ from places where only these retail activities and shopping centers are observed. Fashion exhibitions can help highlight the tourism attractiveness of places where fashion was cultivated and has enriched a location's history and culture, thus retail cannot solely justify fashion's contribution to tourism.

This study sheds light and provides significant insight on the role of fashion exhibitions in tourism. Although only two fashion exhibitions held in two museums were selected, it is anticipated that the findings from the present research may be applied by other museums whose aims are to develop strategies for tourism by increasing their audience through exhibitions. Fashion exhibitions, whether or not they may immediately be associated to museums that are responsible for conceptualizing, materializing, and holding them, can serve as instruments in generating tourism in the contemporary setting where novelty is sought.

Future studies that aim to look into how museums devise strategies to increase visitors may apply a different approach such as quantitative or mixed methods, wherein a larger number of museums can be investigated and various factors such as location, fashion exhibitions previously held or to be held, and other existing and conceptualized strategies for visitor increase can be compared. Since the present study focused on the museum's point of view, the perspective of tourism bodies may also be given consideration in order to obtain substantial information.

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