Fashion meets journalism: Mapping and evaluating Australian fashion media

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Abstract

This study demonstrates how to study fashion journalism from the point of view, that it is its own field of journalism, akin to other journalism beats such as politics, sports and health. There is scope here for comment on the co-evolution of fashion and journalism, leading to ‘fashion journalism’ developing as a distinct field of study in its own right. This research contributes more generally to the field of media and cultural studies, by developing the three-part producer/text/reader model, which is the standard ‘media studies’ analytical framework. The study of fashion media from a cultural studies perspective acknowledges that cultural studies has pioneered the formal study of both journalism and fashion, for instance in studies of women’s magazines; but it has not brought the two areas together sufficiently. What little work has been done, however, has allowed theorists to explore how magazines promote feminism and form culture, which acts as a step in concreting fashion’s importance theoretically. This thesis has contributed to cultural studies by showing the relationship between the corporate industry, of both fashion and media (producer), and the active audience (reader) can be rethought and brought up to date for the more interactive era of the 21st century.

1. Introduction

Fashion journalism is the practice of writing about the textile industry. News stories, feature articles, reviews, analyses, business reports, consumer reports and ‘eye candy’ articles are all forms of fashion journalism. This study maps, evaluates and suggest improvements for the Australian Fashion Media. This analysis is performed through an exploration of fashion media, its channels and motives. Additionally, the key media players responsible for shaping and steering this discrete field within the media domain, into an accountable and exemplary form of journalistic practice, are explained.

Fashion journalism is accused of frivolity to the point of negatively impacting body image. The multi-million dollar business is often not considered a valued part of journalism. From a journalist’s perspective questions, which need addressing are, ‘what is good fashion journalism?’ and ‘what are best practices for writing about it effectively?’ Profiling fashion
journalism from a professional practice perspective, within an academic context, enables real world experience and media research to be combined to generate new information about an area of journalism that is rarely treated with the seriousness it deserves, if and when it is actually mentioned in journalism textbooks. What is ‘good’ fashion journalism and how does it communicate to its readers? Fashion journalists guide consumers about how to make an effort in the wardrobe department. But whether or not fashion and journalism together do a good job of promoting the industry or holding it to account, is another question. The thesis entitled, *Front Row but Losing the Edge: Mapping Evaluating and Improving the Australian Fashion Media*, begins to answer these questions.

This study demonstrates how to study fashion journalism from the point of view, that it is its own field of journalism, akin to other journalism beats such as politics, sports and health. There is scope here for comment on the co-evolution of fashion and journalism, leading to fashion journalism’ developing as a distinct field of study in its own right. ‘Work in cultural studies has centred on three kinds of approaches: ethnography, textual and reception’ (Barker 2000, 25). This research contributes more generally to the field of media and cultural studies, by developing the three-part *producer/text/reader* model, which is the standard ‘media studies’ analytical framework. However, I have added a twist that constitutes the innovations of this thesis.

The study of fashion media from a cultural studies perspective acknowledges that cultural studies has pioneered the formal study of both journalism and fashion, for instance in studies of women’s magazines; but it has not brought the two areas together sufficiently. What little work has been done, however, has allowed theorists to explore how magazines promote feminism and form culture, which acts as a step in concreting fashion’s importance theoretically. This thesis has contributed to cultural studies by showing the relationship between the corporate industry, of both fashion and media (producer), and the active audience (reader) can be rethought and brought up to date for the more interactive era of the 21st century.

2. Gaps in the research (Fashion media as journalism)

Fashion in Australia has always taken a back seat in the news. Fashion journalists are routinely snubbed by hard news journalists. Australian fashion media have always been considered one step behind international rivals, by themselves as well as media professionals overseas.

In a social context the field of study is abundant with information. Newsstands are covered with glossy fashion magazines, newspapers flaunt fashion segments, and television shows dictate fashion trends. However, the subject of magazines is a neglected area of theoretical study. ‘In Australia, the cinema, the press and television continue to attract strong academic interest, but there are significant gaps in our history and understanding of radio, advertising, music and magazines and little sustained academic attention has been paid to them’ (Cunningham and Turner 2002, 3). This is much the same with the academic examination of fashion media.

From the perspective of cultural studies, tensions emerge around the norms of ‘good’ journalism. The ideals of modern journalism are concerned with the important economic and
political affairs of the abstract public space of the nation (Conboy 2007, 8). This space was (and often still is) predominantly occupied and shaped by male decision-makers. The value system of modern journalism has accorded a much lower status to journalism that attends to the ‘ softer’ pleasures and secrets of more feminised, private spaces of the home. Fashion journalism is one genre of journalism that has been rehabilitated by cultural studies because it draws attention to important themes otherwise overlooked and undervalued by modern journalism studies. This includes critical themes such as modernity, gender and the body, consumerism, the city, language, and identity. By placing fashion journalism within a cultural context, themes, which were traditionally overlooked, become evident.

This thesis Front Row but Losing the Edge identified gaps in knowledge about the practice of fashion journalism, contributes to the professional development of fashion journalism in Australia, it maps and evaluates the extent, quality and values of fashion journalism by taking into account the views of stakeholders, in both fashion and media contexts and identifies areas for improvement.

### 3. Fieldwork approach

The thesis asks, ‘What is “good” fashion journalism in Australia?’ It answers in three sections:

- First, it maps the extent of fashion journalism across all media in Australia. This corresponds to the ‘producer’ perspective of media studies.
- Second, it evaluates fashion journalism against the criteria of journalism in general using parameters for ‘good’ journalism taken from the already existing body of knowledge. The opinions of journalists and fashion editors were also featured to obtain their views on what makes ‘good’ fashion journalism. This corresponds to the ‘textual’ component of media analysis.
- Third, stakeholders, including magazine editors, fashion journalists, stylists, freelance writers and other professionals in the fashion industry (who also stand as users, readers and consumers), were interviewed to gauge their response to the parameters of good fashion journalism. For example, they were asked, where they think it is positioned on an international level, how it compares to journalism and how the industry standards might be lifted. This corresponds to the ‘reader’ or ‘audience’ dimension of media studies.

Originally, borrowing from social-science fields such as psychology, models of communication tended to assume a (more or less) passive audience: communication was ‘ caused’ by producers, conveyed through texts, to audiences whose behaviour was affected (Hartley and McKee 2000). Over time media research has developed a model of active audience participation. Front Row but Losing the Edge developed this framework further by focusing not on the ‘ passive’ consumer but on industry users of fashion media: a professionally ‘ active’ audience. The reason this research approach was employed was not only because of its suitability to the structure of the thesis’ discussion but also because of its ability to open up new and as yet unexplored ways to draw information from research. First, very little work that has studied fashion and second, political-economy approaches tend to follow the Frankfurt school and Marxist approaches, which have tended to display an ideological disapproval of fashion.
In terms of the **producer**, a map of the Australian fashion media, historically and geographically, was compiled by seeking to find as many magazines and other types of fashion journalism as possible. This section answered the question: What are the fashion media?

The **text** component was utilised to identify the way journalism reports on fashion in view of its effectiveness. This section answered the questions: What is good fashion journalism? Is Australia doing a good job?

And the interviewed **audience** or readers were leading industry figures who have a stake in the fashion industry. This section answered the questions: What does the industry think of the current standard? What cultural and professional values are being deployed?

The research project contributes to methodological development by drawing on and developing the existing model of communication. This fieldwork took place over four years. Data for this study ranges from 2008 to 2011.

### 4. Research methods

*Front Row but Losing the Edge: Mapping, Evaluating and Improving the Australian Fashion Media*

**Fashion Media** is carried out in three stages:

**Stage 1:** Comprehensive data collection has been used to identify the Australian fashion media and to determine how large the field is. It also locates international titles that are locally available, to note the impact they have on the national market. The map qualitatively profiles a creative industries sub-sector and it allows for a synthesis of different criteria, including the publisher, medium, circulation, readership and price.

**Stage 2:** The description of what constitutes ‘good’ fashion journalism is sourced primarily from classic journalism texts. These detail the history of journalism in Australia and internationally, to gauge how the media domain has developed. Additionally, so-called ‘hard news’ is pitted against fashion journalism to show that mainstream media practice is just as flawed as specialist domains today. And, as mentioned, industry expectations are also pinpointed.

**Stage 3:** Interviews with fashion industry stakeholders evaluated whether the possibility of ‘quality’ fashion journalism was in fact in demand. The interviews discovered what the industry thinks of the current standard of Australian fashion journalism and identified cultural and professional values of the industry.

So, it’s a map of fashion media within a country and not an ethnography of producers and audiences; it’s from the point of view of professional journalism discourse itself and not a textual analysis of fashion media from the point of view of the general reader; and it’s a study of audience reception among professionals and not the general public. The reason for these innovations was so that I could establish the field’s *extent* through mapping, its *criteria* through text and its *performance* by peer-evaluation, in order to show how fashion journalism shares the news values of ‘hard’ news and how far other kinds of journalism share its characteristics such as sport and arts journalism.
5. Findings

1.1. Producer

Empirically mapping the field of fashion media in Australia defines its scope. By locating the context in which fashion journalism is produced and consumed a foundation has been built on which to further develop the area of study and, in doing so, to consider the questions posed. This particular field research was limited to a four-year time frame for data collection. The map was created in 2008 and over the two successive years it was updated to reflect changes in the market.

For the purpose of this study, the map was reanalysed in 2011, to see which publications needed to be removed following the Global Financial Crisis, which led to the closing of numerous businesses, as well as to include new publications that were launched since the creation of the map. In order to make the data more manageable, the results were organised into various categories and then filtered into the types of media, which were and were not of primary concern to the research questions without excluding them from the map.

Table 1. The Australian Fashion Media

| Types   | Australian | International | TOTAL |
|---------|------------|---------------|-------|
| Number  | 190        | 186           | 376   |
| Example | Vogue Australia | Vogue US     |       |

As Table 1 indicates, the first filter applied was used to distinguish between those fashion media which are Australian, and those which are not. Definitions of ‘Australianness’ are highly problematic and controversial. The rules for TV content show how tenuous the link can be: an item is counted as ‘Australian’ if “…the producers of the program are Australian (whether or not the program is produced in conjunction with a co-producer, or an executive producer who is not Australian); and either…the directors of the program are Australian or…the writers of the program are Australian’, then the program is deemed to be Australian’ (Flew 2002). Within a national media sphere, ownership is useful for understanding how the international and locally owned media compete on the newsstands. But ownership is not a sufficient basis for understanding the issues of concern to this study. Instead, creative control is taken as the basis for deeming fashion media to be Australian or not. This approach foregrounds the importance of the Australian creative human capital that is invested in Australian fashion media and that shapes the professional practices of the field and its future.

For this reason, creative control is taken as the basis for deeming fashion media to be Australian or not. This approach foregrounds the importance of the Australian creative human capital that is invested in Australian fashion media and that shapes the professional practices of the field. Overall, 376 fashion-related publications were identified in the Australian market place. The map provided a direct numerical answer to who the fashion media are. This was done using a ‘top down’ approach to mapping by generating a national picture of the fashion journalism market starting with the producers and working down.
A bottom up approach was also used to focus on and find fashion media within the entire body of publications available within the country. This necessitates a ‘snowballing’ (Henkel 2000) approach to data collection that is characteristic of the ‘bottom up’ approach.

The 2011 ratings, readership and circulation were also analysed to determine the highest circulating publications in the market (National Title Tracker 2011, Gordon and Gotch 2011, Libraries Australia 2011, Australian Bureau of Circulations 2011).

Table 2. Top Ten Australian Magazines by Category

| Publication                          | Circulation | Readership |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| **Newspaper Magazines**             |             |            |
| *Sunday Magazine*                   | 720068      | 2116000    |
| *Sunday Life*                       | 673650      | 1234000    |
| *Good Weekend*                      | 622541      | 1635000    |
| *U on Sunday*                       | 498673      | 1224000    |
| *STM The Sunday Times Magazine*     | 354000      | 554000     |
| *Q Weekend*                         | 305215      | 890000     |
| *The Age Melbourne Magazine*        | 195900      | 659000     |
| *Wish*                              | 101052      | 360000     |
| *Paradise*                          | 62210       | 178000     |
| *City News*                         | 49980       | 57000      |
| **Newspapers**                      |             |            |
| *The Age*                           | 659000      | 195900     |
| *Sydney Morning Herald*             | 659000      | 738000     |
| *Sunday Herald*                     | 618000      | 1600000    |
| *Herald Sun*                        | 530000      | INA        |
| *Weekend Australian*                | 305000      | 847000     |
| *The Sunday Age*                    | 231000      | 689000     |
| *Courier Mail*                      | 227000      | INA        |
| *The West Australian*               | 203304      | INA        |
| Publication                  | Circulation | Readership |
|-----------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Australian Financial Review | 74733       | 255000     |
| Sunday Tasmanian            | 57283       | 133000     |

**Magazines**

| Publication                        | Circulation | Readership |
|------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Australian Women's Weekly          | 486179      | 222800     |
| Bmag                               | 425904      | 1101000    |
| Women's Day                        | 385016      | 1999000    |
| New Idea                           | 316527      | 1443000    |
| Cosmopolitan                       | 175455      | 694000     |
| Cleo                               | 160137      | 517000     |
| Dolly                              | 141026      | 428000     |
| OK                                  | 140826      | 328000     |
| Family Circle                      | 120532      | INA        |
| Women's Health                     | 93959       | 469000     |

**Fashion Magazines**

| Publication                           | Circulation | Readership |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Emporium The Myer Magazine            | 248000      | INA        |
| Marie Claire                          | 115500      | 497000     |
| Madison                               | 97632       | 252000     |
| Shop Til You Drop                     | 75017       | 200000     |
| InStyle                               | 60128       | 221000     |
| Harper's Bazaar                       | 53531       | 258000     |
| Grazia                                | 53511       | 173000     |
| Vogue                                 | 51827       | 347000     |
| Fashion Journal                       | 40000       | 180000     |
| Attitude                              | 40000       | 160000     |

In order to answer the question, ‘what is “good” fashion journalism in Australia?’ the Fashion Media deemed to be Australian, are further classified by medium.
Four categories in Table 3 indicate the extent of the Australian fashion media, although the data available does not permit a comprehensive listing of the circulation and readership figures for all publications that circulate within Australia, because of differences between them in the ways that they collect and release data about themselves. Even so, the table shows the overall scope of the Australian fashion media and the proportions for different media platforms.

The types of magazines listed may not necessarily be fashion magazines but they still report on fashion and therefore are a source for fashion journalism. Table 4 indicates the relative numbers of magazines in different genres.

Table 3. Australian Fashion by Platform

| Types   | Magazine          | Newspaper  | Television | Internet |
|---------|-------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Number  | 141               | 40         | 4          | 5        |
| Example | Curve             | The Australian | The Closet Tales of Australian Fashion | Sassy Bella |

Table 4. Australian Fashion Magazine Types

| Types        | Example                     | Number |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------|
| Fashion      | Harper’s Bazaar             | 29     |
| Lifestyle    | Frankie                     | 21     |
| Women’s      | AWW                         | 10     |
| Men’s        | Ralph                       | 8      |
| Teen         | Dolly                       | 9      |
| Photography  | Poster                      | 2      |
| Hair         | Australian Hair and Beauty  | 3      |
| Celebrity    | Famous                      | 6      |
| Bridal       | Bride To Be                 | 53     |

The mapping exercise has clearly identified the scope and extent of fashion media in Australia. This provides a basis for the consideration of what can constitute ‘good’ fashion journalism within those titles. It has also provided an important benchmark for the longitudinal study of the fashion media. This has been achieved by recognising a sizable, growing, and dynamic but neglected, misunderstood and wrongly classified component of the
overall media mix available in Australia. Overall, the *Australian Fashion Media Map* has successfully produced a view of national media products. Together they form ‘the industry’ that sustains – or does not sustain – ‘good’ fashion journalism.

5.2 Text

Fashion journalism faces criticisms similar to that of mainstream journalism such as complaints about PR-driven regurgitation to fluff-filled pages. However, according to the market and active readers, the reality is that the style notes of Australian fashion writers and journalists are on par with world-class standards. Standard accounts of Australian journalism (Bonney and Wilson 1983, Conboy 2007) offer little insight into the fashion world, although studies in Australia and worldwide have provided an insight into the culture of magazines and women’s publications (Winship 1987, Hermes 1995, Weiner 1999, Craik 2000, Hartley and Rennie 2004, Lumby 1999). However, a platform for change is still lacking within the industry nationally as a whole.

An analysis of ‘good’ fashion journalism was based on standard criteria for good journalism more generally, where it is widely accepted that the key to ‘good’ writing is in the ability to reflect, inform, persuade, evaluate, discover and affirm. Then these questions of practice were applied to the different types of fashion journalism – runway reports, trend forecasts, features, red carpet watching and beauty reviews which were catalogued and explained as types of writing that engage with fashion. This opened up a dialogue with other writings on the topic, both scholarly and practical, of which topics were first identified in the literature review, to elaborate on the success of current fashion media. Generally, fashion journalism is edutainment, although there are occasions when it spills over into the news pages, and specialist publications will cover developments in the industry itself.

Magazines in which these types of articles appear were then analysed to discover what proportion of a magazine is editorial as opposed to advertising. This distinction helps to pinpoint those publications which are privy to the beauty and fragrance dollar to determine their journalistic integrity. This area of study could be explored further, but it was beyond the scope of my research project.

Aside from print publications, the web has opened up a whole new platform from which to deliver fashion journalism. In some instances this is proving positive as a support for print; at the same time it has provoked the fear that online media will eventually outlive the lifespan of print. As a medium the interactive mode and almost infinite scope of the internet has provided a new way for readers to interact with images and video footage of fashion. Blogs have also benefited from this technology. Overall, fashion journalism is seeing a dramatic change in how it’s perceived and used as a medium in this new technological revolution.

5.3 Audience

From 2008 to 2011 I interviewed a select group of 22 informed and practicing media professionals whose views acted as a guide for improving the quality of Australian fashion journalism. This guide was distilled from sixteen fixed questions in total, which allowed for open responses to gauge a personal and professional view of the industry. The interviewees identified five models of fashion journalism, which are: news and features; review; criticism and analysis; business reports’ consumer reports; and eye candy features. By sectioning out
which models of journalism may attract more negative attention than others, for example the ‘eye candy’ features, a typology of what ‘good’ and ‘bad’ journalism might be was identified. While popular with newspaper editors and presumably some readers, ‘girls in bikinis’ will always warrant comment from social theorists, feminists, academics and the general populace. This is why it’s important to establish fashion journalism as its own field with its own values.

However when writing any type of fashion feature, the interviewees were able to pinpoint five easy steps for journalists to avoid clichéd writing, and for magazines to steer clear of producing bad features despite reporting on a ‘frivolous’ topic. The instructions were simple: do the research, report the facts, and communicate effectively to your audience. If you are interested in what you are writing about your audience will be too. Be critical and question what you are writing about. Ensure you do not include bias. There is a clear circular process to follow. There is a new direction fashion journalism needs to take to survive and Rachel Sharp as both a journalist, editor and voice for the other contributors in a personal email interview on April 21, 2009 said, ‘fashion journalism is intended to inform and to entertain. To do both of these things, it needs to be done to a high standard (of photography, story idea gathering, originality and execution). So I’d like to see a constant improvement in standards and the expertise/credibility of fashion journalists.’

Other points that were mentioned include: ensuring that stories are newsworthy; that they investigate the matter; and that as a journalist you observe first and then report. Ideas of Australian fashion media standards were also formed, drawing out conclusions that both championed and criticised national journalistic practices. It was confirmed that journalists without a background in fashion journalism could nevertheless report on fashion successfully. However, the biggest concern was that there was serious disgruntlement within the field about the attention that sports journalism received over fashion. ‘It still amazes me that people consider 16-page sections about men kicking balls around to be more serious than coverage of a global industry that employs many millions of people,’ explained Marion Hume in a personal email interview on March 22, 2011. In terms of substance and worthiness, they can be considered to be on an equal playing field. They both report on a spectator event that the general community is involved in too – sports watching and playing versus clothes buying and wearing. However more importantly, the purpose of fashion journalism was discussed. Australian journalism about fashion is seen by insiders as a specialised form of reporting that discusses trends, style and people in the business.

The findings in this research all proved that in-depth, investigative and informative journalism can function next to infotainment style features. This means that while fashion can be reported on by delving into the depths of the multi-million dollar business that it is, it can also be entertaining by cleverly poking fun at and mocking those areas of the business that are frivolous and fun. Such variety of coverage is necessary because fashion media must appeal to a much wider readership than just fashionistas. The question of how fashion journalism translates the specialist knowledge of fashion into terms that will appeal to everyone is also important. One way to do it is The Australian way, with pretty models, lots of leg and ‘girls in bikinis which editors always love’ (Safe 2007). But there is much more to it than that. The newspaper is currently using the practice to entice readers to look at the online version of the paper, presumably in order to build the subscription base through sex appeal.

Mostly, however, the interviewed professionals wanted to see a deeper understanding from
the reader, as to what and why certain features land on a page. At the end of the day it was clear that these journalists were extremely passionate about their profession but understood that fashion may be less important than war reporting but is not less significant than sport. From science and nature to war ‘Fashion certainly has its place – it will never be as important as the reporting on a world crisis, natural disaster or health epidemic,’ said Kerrie Simon, Editor in Chief, Cosmopolitan Middle East (Personal email interview on January 21, 2009). ‘But it should be recognised that fashion can and often does work hand in hand with these events. It’s a simple equation: people love fashion, fashion targets a worthy cause, fashion followers donate to this cause,’ she said. Using a similar equation the importance of fashion journalism can be noted: everybody wears clothes, clothes are fashion, writers document that fashion, magazines are produced, people who wear clothes read those magazines and buy more clothes – and the better they are informed, the better it is for the industry.

5.4 Fashion journalism

This study found that while media and cultural studies have continued to develop their own theories, the media and fashion industries have also developed new methods and themes, which can now be applied to develop the field of fashion journalism further theoretically. In relation to the various themes arising from the way that fashion media have been treated in cultural studies, as identified in the literature review, the findings can be used to modify each of them as follows:

- **Modernity** is characterised by a *professionalisation* of fashion and fashion media and at the same time a *democratisation* of fashion values, resulting in both fashion and fashion media becoming much more central to contemporary culture, such that the Frankfurt School tradition of critique is no longer sufficient to analyse it.

- **Gender** has shifted into a different analytic frame, which is more about *professional and career* questions than about the representation of women. Previously fashion journalism has attracted criticism from gender studies because of stereotypical depictions of gender roles, but this new approach has a practical focus, which allows fashion journalism to be judged on practice rather than on content.

- **Language**: The language of media systems has long been studied to show how publications turn readers into consumers. But in this research, ‘readers’ and ‘consumers’ are also producers and communicators of meaning. This allows for a model inclusive of open dialogue with readers, who may dictate trends just as much as journalists. This applies both to fashion insiders who read fashion media, and also to fashion consumers who use participatory media to comment on fashion trends; for example, blogs on street style.

- **Identity and national identity** in fashion journalism focused on Australian costume history from a colonial dress sense (Maynard 1994, 2001) and the history of swimwear as a specifically Australian garment (Schmidt 2008). Today, Australian designers are forging an exploratory, new-look nation, from Australian-made fashion for a global market, to finding a niche that distinguishes local design from overseas brands. And Australian journalists are translating these trends to the world. As a result the interviewees in my research project wanted to see more focus on developing this new national identity. That trend in turn has hitherto been neglected in media studies.
The City: Fashion is now more pervasive and global, partly thanks to fashion journalism, especially online media. This builds on the global mediation of fashion pioneered in the 1990’s by the brand-name glossy magazines, whose national versions routinely syndicated each other's content, developing a sense of ‘planet Elle’, for instance, for readers. In other words, the theme of ‘the city’, which was long a concern in cultural and film studies, has a new cosmopolitan impulse, where each great city sees itself in relation to others around the world and not only in terms of its importance to the country in which it is situated.

This rethinking of the longstanding themes of cultural and media studies demonstrates that both investigating fashion media can lead to the revision of those themes, and that previous studies have not considered fashion journalism. This study reveals that new cultural and professional values are now being deployed. Finally, this thesis demonstrates that fashion is really not one sided. It is not as ‘bad’ as what social commentary, can at times, make it out to be. With a clear justification of what taints fashion journalism – including accepting gifts, regurgitating press releases and pandering to designers wants – these new ways to improve the industry can be easily put into practice. This research also stands as one of the first positive steps towards rethinking fashion media with a view to how it is set to change over the next few years.

The chapter on industry produces a benchmark to demonstrate that the fashion media sector is larger, more diverse, and of greater economic and cultural reach than is commonly recognised in cultural and media studies. Fashion is a popular area of interest that is carried across many Australian publications. However, it is interesting to note that the number of actual publications that cover fashion exclusively is comparatively small; only 33 publications to be precise, which is only 15.63 percent of the total scope of national Australian-based fashion-related titles cover fashion. This shows that while fashion clearly has a wider reach beyond fashion magazines, journalists who cover fashion may or may not be trained explicitly for the beat. This in itself is a reason why it is so important to identify ‘good’ fashion journalism according to general journalism practices.

The chapter on text shows how the values of journalism and fashion journalism overlap. Previously, cultural and media studies have generally not studied fashion media as part of professional journalism in general, with its widely discussed internal ethics and standards, but as a symptom of various power differences in society, especially those to do with gender and commercial power. Current industry practices were highlighted to identify how any journalist, whether their subject is fashion or not, should be able to participate effectively in fashion journalism, in order to show that it is not a just a symptom of society but a professional practice. Like other specialist areas of journalism, the key role of fashion journalism is to educate and entertain. To write fashion features, a journalist needs to choose the right approach, ask the right question in the interview, write up the story and then add a snappy sell and head. This process may seem simple but in practice it is a premeditated, manipulated and precise form of writing.

Understanding that, fashion journalism was critiqued against a list of parameters, documenting ‘good’ journalism: A story should always do one of six things”

- reflect
- inform
- persuade
From this analysis it was demonstrated that fashion journalism is just as well written, powerful and purposeful as any form of journalism. Any difference arises from the way that fashion is delivered which often includes injecting elements of humour, critique and analysis, as well as a powerful visual element.

In the chapter on audience the industry professionals who I interviewed, profiled a list of do’s and don’ts for journalists, on how to write fashion journalism effectively. Their aim was to improve current industry standards according to an ideal professional practice. These interviews added up to a ‘professional’ view of fashion journalism that contrasts rather starkly with the picture created in the literature review.

6. Conclusion

Front Row but Losing the Edge produced results that showed the value of the industry. The results of my research can be utilised by magazine editors and journalists. They can draw from the data what the current state of the industry looks like and identify where their title is situated on the map. This research also assists the research field of media and cultural studies, by demonstrating that they need to change too, to take into account fashion journalism as it enters the digital era. The thesis was able to address the always thorny issue of what counts as ‘good’ fashion journalism by applying parameters developed in one sector of the profession (journalism) to another (lifestyle and fashion fields).

So what is good fashion journalism?

Good journalism in this context is determined by professional journalists and fashion-media professionals, and it circulates in an enormous array of media that are routinely ignored in media studies. My interviews confirmed that fashion journalists need to take responsibility for their writing, to sharpen the industry’s out-flux, and in turn to dispel doubts about its importance among people outside of the industry. While acknowledging that there will be ‘eye candy’ features, good journalism can be practiced if these are also supported by news and features, critiques, reviews, business reports and consumer reports. It is the responsibility of the journalist and the editor to sort the good from the bad, to educate and to encourage the use of infotainment, but to do it with a critical eye.

My analyses lead to a concrete proposal for improving fashion journalism in Australia. My work assists the industry, and I also understand the practice better as a working professional myself. The key difference between journalism and fashion journalism is that criticism and critiques are acceptable in the fashion context, just as they are in cultural journalism and reviews. That does not amount to being critical for the sake of it, but if a writer is going to say that a particular designer is one of the greatest designers of the last decade, they need to be able to back up their statement with reasoning, and pinpoint specifics about what has secured this designer such a title. A fashion journalist also needs to understand the skills of the stylist, photographer and editor. These professional specialisms all play a part in highlighting any story written on fashion. At the same time, writers need to converse with
their readers and tell a story. Fashion journalism is afforded the luxury of using fun, in-depth, news-based and often intelligent features to represent its industry.

7. Directions for further research

Fashion journalism is a broad field in relation to both generic content and technological platforms. Exploring the full range of content would go beyond the scope of this project. Similarly, it has not been possible to take full account of technological changes and the possibilities for innovation they present. While it was noted that other new platforms could emerge – a daily glossy fashion newspaper, for instance, or a collector’s fashion magazine – online is currently on-trend. It is obvious that the future of fashion journalism is online, but the question of form does need to be addressed, because the commercial benefits of a glossy magazine are equally obvious and the credibility of newspapers has been proven. However, after analysing the current trends and markets in the online world, it seems that a new niche is opening up; the moving magazine. The moving magazine can utilise the best of both print and online while giving the reader a fly on the wall perception of fashion, in much the same way that reality television does. My research has highlighted gaps in the market that can be utilised to create a new platform in fashion media. Fashion journalism will ultimately benefit from the shift in reporting methods and delivery techniques.

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