The Importance of Fashion Events in the City of Oporto: The Fashion Industry Perspective

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to analyse the relationship between fashion events and the tourism sector, focusing on how this relationship can also affect the development of the fashion industry. On the empirical side, using a qualitative methodology, the research presents a case study, investigating the relationship between the fashion events in the city of Oporto and the development of the Portuguese fashion industry. The main findings show how fashion events contribute to the evolution of exportation of Portuguese fashion products, as well as the positive development of the valorisation of Portuguese fashion by foreign buyers, highlighting the strong synergy and the mutual influence between fashion events and the positive development of Portuguese fashion industry. In terms of managerial implications, the authors suggest the existence of a mutual effect between the fashion events in the city of Oporto and the success of Portuguese fashion industry, in terms of influence on consumer’s behaviour concerning the Portuguese fashion products.

Keywords: Fashion events · Tourism of fashion events · Fashion cities · City of Oporto

1 Introduction

One subsector of tourism that has gained emphasis in recent years is the tourism of fashion events, which consist on promotional events (fashion shows, fashion weeks, showcases, fairs and exhibitions) [1] in which designers and fashion companies present their new collections [2].

Fashion events are mostly held in cities recognized worldwide as fashion cities. These cities are characterized by a wide range of business, financial, entertainment, cultural and leisure activities and have strong and unique identities [3] that distinguish them from competitors. Tourists of fashion events are attracted by the image of fashion cities, very characterized by high status, elegance and dynamism. Thus, fashion events
emerge as differentiating elements, capable of adding value to a destination, in an increasingly competitive tourist market [4, 5].

For the success of an event, it is essential to have a congruence relationship between three distinct components: the image of the event, the image of the organizers and sponsors and the self-image of the participants [6]. In fact, the way each participant sees himself affects not only his/her evaluation of the event, but also the way he/she relates to the collaborating brands in the organization of the event [7, 8].

Nowadays, local governments of many cities have already realized the importance of fashion events, since the higher the place a destination occupies in the global hierarchy of fashion city, the higher the number of benefits and outcomes resulting for it [1].

With the motivation of knowing the impacts of the fashion events in the city of Oporto, regarding the Portuguese fashion industry perspective, the purpose of this article is to present and discuss the results of an empirical study with Portuguese fashion business associations, presented by representatives’ perceptions of the evolution of the fashion events and how Portuguese and foreign audiences value Portuguese fashion, fashion events and the city of Oporto as a tourism destination.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Fashion

Fashion corresponds to the most popular styles (trends) in a society at a given time [9, 10]. It is important to highlight that fashion refers not only to tangible goods such as clothing, footwear and furniture, but also to intangible goods, such as music [11], being closely related to the behaviours and practices experienced in a society at a given time, that is, with sociocultural trends [12, 13].

For the clothing and footwear sectors, fashion is defined as the institutionally accepted way of dress for the individuals of a certain society in a certain period [13, 14]. However, inversely to the concept of clothing, which corresponds to the need to be used, as well as usefulness, fashion is associated with value and social status, being found only in places where it is culturally constructed and disseminated [13]. Thus, fashion is influenced by context, that is, it has the ability to vary from society to society [10].

Nowadays it is described as an element of social behaviour with a very important role in the daily life of the human being [15, 16], since instead of the past in which people bought clothes out of necessity, consumers buy clothes for several reasons: to be fashionable, to impress others, to be accepted in society and in their various groups, for emotional reasons (related to increased self-esteem), among others [17]. The choice of certain pieces of clothing at the time of purchase is also motivated by the messages, values and symbolisms they support [16] so it is, therefore, a procedure associated with several social, psychological, economic and even emotional elements [18], being decisive to recognize the impact that they have in the consumer decision process [19].

Considering the growing demand of luxury fashion, it is worth noting the fact that it is closely associated with an experience characterized by authenticity, ownership, and exclusivity [20]. In fact, the luxury fashion products consist in slow-fashion products. Slow fashion is based on equity, authenticity, regionalism, exclusivity, functionality
and sustainability. Slow fashion products are made using local/national products by employees who benefit from fair working conditions. They are high quality products, with simple and timeless designs, and their high costs are associated with their value and unique traits that reflect the identity of each piece.

2.2 Fashion Industry

The fashion design industry is broad, diverse and encompasses the subsectors of footwear, textiles, jewellery, and leather goods. Its main objective is to add to the different pieces of clothing, footwear and accessories, aesthetic, but also symbolic value.

Another of the main purposes of the fashion industry of a determined nation is to allow the consumers to identify the country as an indicator of product quality, because, therefore, they will have a preference for the fashion products of that country. In this perspective, the fashion industry is highly relevant to the national economy and, therefore, national marketing strategies should develop and promote a positive image of the country and its products, in order to increase the volume of exports.

Effectively, the international notoriety of a national brand is the result of a collective marketing action, which must be applied by the several stakeholders in the sector. Collaborations in the fashion industry have as main objectives to promote the image of brands, add value to them and improve the promotion of products in the market, with reduced costs. Another factor that facilitates this success is the location of most companies of the sector in the same city/region and the establishment of a single organization representing the interests of the entire national fashion industry.

In the fashion sector, differentiation between competing products is crucial and, therefore, it is important that brands position themselves in the market to be recognized and to have a competitive advantage.

The fashion industry of a country has the role of strengthening and increasing production and maintaining active relations with all national and foreign fashion centres to enhance the technical, artistic, and professional development of national production. The development of the fashion industries is influenced by a country’s current socio-cultural and economic context. The success of the fashion cluster must therefore be analysed as a connection between internal and external cycles of knowledge sharing.

2.3 Fashion Events

Fashion events have as main objective to celebrate fashion and design and can be of a promotional nature, especially parades, fairs and exhibitions, fashion weeks and showcases where new trends are presented to the first time and designers and stylists present their new collections, or informative, such as conferences where several topics associated with the sector are addressed, related to new trends in production and distribution, technological advancement, sustainability, management, reaching new markets, among others.

A fashion event can also be considered a package of events, an example of which are the fashion weeks that incorporate various events of a diverse nature.
(Fashion shows, exhibitions, showrooms and social events as cocktails, dinners and parties, among others). The combination of several events in a week allows to attract different audiences, reduce costs, and add value to the participants’ experience [36].

In fact, fashion events can generate value, for both their organizers and participants, as well as for other stakeholders who may not be directly related to the fashion industry, such as the tourism sector [13]. Thus, fashion events allow the different brands of the sector to be able to enter foreign markets, presenting collections that answer the needs of their consumers.

These events mostly consist in business events and, therefore, allow networking moments between different professionals of the sector, the dissemination of knowledge, ideas and thoughts and the creation of new collaborations, enhancing innovation, creativity and multiple positive outcomes [37].

2.4 Fashion Cities

The destinations where fashion events take place are known as fashion cities, and have privileges over competitor places, since their image are associated with high symbolic values, which allow them to attract a high number of resources, visitors and capital [38]. There is a global network of global fashion cities, which are known worldwide, being strongly related to the fashion industry, occupying several places in the hierarchy of fashion cities, in which Paris, London, Milan and New York are the top four.

Fashion cities are the places where new trends are developed and presented to society and, therefore, the most emblematic companies of the sector consider these to be the ideal places for holding fashion events, as well as for the location of its physical stores, since they are authentic business centres, recognized for their unique identity [2].

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Nowadays, cities attract the best creative talents, since the structure of their social networks is wide and culturally available to accommodate different cultures in the same place. These are places with a high quality of life, where diversity is an advantage [5]. In fact, on Fashion cities, there is a concentration of different creative industries [39]. The creative industries comprise activities that, as the name implies, originate from creativity, as well as talent, and have the capacity to generate jobs and wealth.

2.5 Case Study

The city of Oporto is the second largest city of the country and the most representative of the northern region of Portugal. Its historic centre was considered cultural historical heritage by UNESCO in 1996. This elevation gave it the status of “World Heritage City” due to its historical wealth. In 2001, the city of Oporto was distinguished as European City of Culture, having gathered throughout the year, in various events, several renowned national and international artists. This distinction allowed the city of Oporto to be recognized simultaneously as a city of traditions and a modern city [40].
Over the last few years there has been a positive development of the city of Oporto as a tourist destination, increasing its recognition internationally. The city of Oporto has been working in a remarkable way regarding its positioning on the European map. In fact, in addition to winning international distinction, it has achieved the position of European destination. Oporto was considered the Best European Destination in 2012, 2014 and 2017 – a distinction awarded annually by European Consumers Choice. This distinction offers attractiveness and notoriety to the city of Oporto as a tourist destination, also revealing itself as a potential for economic growth of the region.

Indeed, the tourism sector has shown significant growth not only in the city of Oporto, but throughout the northern region, supported by its historical, cultural, natural, architectural and gastronomic heritage, attracting, increasingly, a greater number of visitors [41]. The northern region is also the core of the Portuguese fashion industry because most of the companies of the textile sector are located there (Table 1).

|          | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018  | 2019  | 2020* |
|----------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Guests   | 1,443,376 | 1,287,725 | 1,426,863 | 1,536,798 | 1,958,645 | 2,223,458 | 278,150 |
| Overnight stays | 2,246,244 | 2,515,659 | 2,833,406 | 3,040,424 | 4,001,160 | 4,535,329 | 410,071 |

Source: INE, 2020; ATP, 2020

The city of Oporto is the stage of several fashion events, including Porto Fashion Week and Portugal Fashion, which are effectively two of the main Portuguese fashion events, as well as in the Iberian Peninsula. The city of Oporto can offer fashion events favourable conditions, including climate, infrastructure and equipment, the diversity of complementary leisure activities and a good communications network.

3 Methodology

The objectives of the present research are to understand the evolution of fashion events in the city of Oporto and the respective demand; to understand the development of the Portuguese fashion industry vis-a-vis the national public and the foreign public; to know the objectives of business associations of the fashion sector; to identify the partnerships established between business associations; to understand the synergies resulting from the partnerships created with the public sector in the promotion of fashion events and tourist destination.

To fulfil the objectives of this research, was adopted the qualitative methodology, and the semi-structured interview was used as a data collection instrument. The interview is an advantageous data collection technique due its efficiency and the fact it promotes the collection of diversified data [42]. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by the existence of a previously prepared script but offer the interviewer the freedom to include during the interview, several aspects considered as convenient.
Interviews were conducted individually with three representatives of the main business associations representing the Portuguese fashion industry, that organize the main fashion events of the city of Oporto and Portugal, in general (Table 2).

| No. interview | Interview date | Interview duration |
|---------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 1             | 27/04/2020     | 32:59             |
| 2             | 28/05/2020     | 44:32             |
| 3             | 28/05/2020     | Written response  |

Source: Authors

Table 2. Interviews

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The interview schedule includes several open-ended questions:

- What are the main objectives that your entity intends to achieve with the realization of fashion events in the city of Oporto?
- What are the main results from the realization of fashion events for the Portuguese fashion industry?
- How has the growth and development of brands and companies of the national textile sector been verified?
- How do you assess the importance of partnerships established between business associations for the success of fashion events?
- What is the role of these partnerships in the development of the national fashion industry?
- In your perspective, what is the potential of fashion events that must be explored for their success to be increased?
- What do you recognize that is more valued by participants concerning fashion events?
- Over the past few years, how has the foreign public recognized the companies and brands of the Portuguese fashion industry?
- How does holding fashion events allow for greater interaction between the Portuguese fashion industry and foreign buyers?
- What is the impact of fashion events in the city of Oporto on the increase in exports of fashion products?
- Has the holding of fashion events with international impact, attracted an increasing number of international tourists, specifically for these events?
- Is there use of the presence of international participants to offer complementary activities to extend their stay?
- Are fashion events promoted abroad by the public sector, notably by local and regional tourism authorities?
- What aspects would you want to see improved in terms of promotion?

Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis method – the comprehension of the phenomena must emerge from the data rather than from preconceived notions formulated by the researcher.
4 Results

To understand the relationship between the fashion events realized in the city of Oporto and the development of the Portuguese fashion industry, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The analysis of these interviews revealed the following integrative categories, presented in Table 3: Fashion Events; Portuguese Fashion Industry; Oporto as a Tourism Destination; and Consequences of Covid-19. A deeper description of the results is presented in the rest of this section with participants’ transcriptions to illustrate and facilitate understanding.

Table 3. Core categories and subcategories.

| Core categories                  | Subcategories                                                                 |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fashion events                   | Objectives                                                                    |
|                                  | Results                                                                       |
|                                  | Appreciation by participants                                                  |
|                                  | Beneficial for the fashion industry                                          |
|                                  | Potential to be improved                                                      |
| Portuguese fashion industry      | Evolution                                                                     |
|                                  | Relationship with foreign public                                             |
|                                  | Partnerships                                                                  |
| Oporto as a tourism destination  | Valuing the city                                                             |
|                                  | Support from DMO’s                                                           |
| Consequences of Covid-19         | Negative Impacts                                                             |

About Fashion Events, the objectives that are intended to be achieved with their realization, are, to promote Portuguese textile and clothing industry, both nationally and internationally, bring international customers closer to the Portuguese industrial fabric, put the city of Oporto on the roadmap of international fashion cities, boost the relationship between production and creation, promoting the design and quality of the product with competitive advantage and promote the aesthetic revitalization of national fashion. Effectively, fashion events have “the purpose of boosting the relationship between production and creation, promoting design as a critical factor of the competitiveness of the textile and clothing industry and encouraging creators to assume a business strategy for their activities (...), fostering generational renewal of national fashion through the launch of new creators (...) and strengthen the internationalization of the textile sector in foreign markets” (3).

The most important result from the realization of fashion events are “the evolution of the fashion industry with regard to several critical factors of competitiveness such as design, marketing, innovation, quality and distribution” (3).

The participants of the fashion events organized in the city of Oporto value “innovation and presentation, logistics organization” (1) and interpersonal contact experience.
The holding of fashion events in the city of Oporto facilitates the interaction between the national textile sector and the foreign public, and directly influences the increase in exports of fashion products. In fact, “the dynamics of the event are always thought of in order to enhance the interaction between Portuguese companies and foreign buyers” (6).

For fashion events to be more successful there must be a bet on “the promotion, communication and attraction capacity of international audiences” (2), notoriety, as well as appreciation for Portuguese authenticity and also the attraction of private sponsorships, since public funds are not always enough to achieve all the desired objectives.

Concerning to the Portuguese fashion industry, companies have shown an increase in exports, promoting themselves in international markets, looking for new costumer dynamically. The brands are very few in Portugal and most cannot get out of the online register and often consist only of exports brands, however they have shown a positive development concerning production quality and responsiveness, having been gaining notoriety in international markets. Portuguese brands “currently have not only production quality, responsiveness and distribution channels, but also a more careful design and in line with fashion trends. (...) Increasingly the label “made in Portugal” adds value and is a differentiating fact and notoriety” (3).

The foreign public recognizes the textile and clothing industry Portuguese due to the dynamism of Portuguese companies seeking to participate in international fairs to reach new audiences, revealing concerns regarding the strategy, gaining competitive advantage over other competing markets. “We have a very complete fashion ecosystem from the point of view of the elements that are part of it, but that still does not work 100%. There is a lot of potential, but it is necessary that designers, industry and investors work truly in synergy, because only in this way, we will be able to truly climb the name of Portugal” (3).

In fact, the creation of partnerships between business associations, both national and international, is crucial to the success of fashion events. However, there is still an important work to be done, in creating partnerships between the several layers in the fashion industry, so that its potential is maximized and the brand “Portugal” could be truly recognized as a brand of excellence. “The textile industry in Portugal is a family that was already more disunited that it is today, particularly in associative terms” (1) so “partnerships, synergies and collaborations that add scope and opportunities are always important and should be highly valued” (3).

Concerning to the relationship between the participants of the fashion events and the city of Oporto as a tourism destination, they greatly value the destination Portugal and take the opportunity to visit the city of Oporto. Participants of fashion events “return to participate in next editions, extend their overnights and travel accompanied by friends and/or family” (1). Thus, it is important to offer complementary programmes, more directed to the tourism offer in the city, and also social events, able to add value to tourist’s global experience.

The support of local and regional DMO’s should not only be limited to promotion but should also include the provision of spaces and allowances for holding social events, complementary to major fashion events, as well as in the travel facilities of foreign guests. “The textile industry benefits from the fact that there is a tourism boom
in Europe and especially in Portugal, but tourism also benefits from these fashion events that bring to the city of Oporto many participants from abroad, who enjoy restaurants, hotels, hostels, among other tourism resources and attractions” (1).

About the consequences of Covid-19, the pandemic had a negative impact on the textile sector, but it was reinvented through the production of masks and other hospital textile products. “Masks can really be the product of the year and, after all, their production can mitigate the impact of this pandemic for textile companies” (1). Although the pandemic did not affect the calendar of international fashion events in the fall/winter season, the dates of the spring/summer season, scheduled in September and October 2020, may be affected. “Audience events will need a lot of time to recover, people need to regain confidence in going out, joining with other people, and after that, it will be possible to organize public events again” (1).

Table 4 summarizes the results obtained in the interviews with representatives of the Business Associations.

| Theme              | Conclusions                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Interviewed |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Fashion events     | The objectives that are intended to be achieved with the fashion events are to promote the Portuguese textile and clothing industry, on a national and international scale, bring international customers closer to the industrial fabric Portuguese, put the city of Porto on the roadmap of the international fashion cities, boost the relationship between production and creation, promoting the design and quality of product as a competitive advantage and promoting the aesthetic revitalization of national fashion | E4/E5/E6   |
|                    | The results from the realization of fashion events are the evolution of the fashion industry regarding several critical factors of competitiveness, such as design, marketing, innovation, quality, distribution                                                                                           | E4/E5/E6   |
|                    | Participants value innovation and presentation, logistics organization and interpersonal contact experience                                                                                                     | E4/E5/E6   |
|                    | The holding of fashion events in the city of Porto facilitates the interaction between the national textile sector and the international public, and directly influences the increase in exports of fashion products                                                                                     | E4/E6      |
|                    | For fashion events to be more successful there must be a commitment to the promotion, communication and attraction capacity of international audiences, the notoriety, the appreciation of Portuguese authenticity and, also, the attraction of private sponsorships, since public funds are not always necessary to achieve all the desired objectives | E4/E5/E6   |

(continued)
| Theme                        | Conclusions                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Interviewed |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Portuguese Fashion Industry  | Companies have shown an increase in exports, promoting themselves in international markets, looking for new customers in a dynamic way. Trademarks are in small numbers in Portugal and most cannot leave online registration and often consist only of export marks; however, they have shown a positive development in production quality and responsiveness and have gained notoriety in international markets. | E5/E6       |
|                              | The international public recognizes the textile and clothing industry Portuguese due to the dynamism of Portuguese companies seeking to participate in international fairs in order to reach new audiences, revealing concerns regarding the strategy, gaining competitive advantage over other competing markets. | E4/E5/E6    |
|                              | The creation of partnerships between business associations, both national and international, is central to the success of fashion events. However, there is still a lot of work to be done in establishing partnerships between the various players in the fashion industry, so that its potential is maximized and the “Portugal” brand is truly recognized as a brand of excellence abroad | E4/E5/E6    |
| Oporto as a Tourism Destination | The participants of the events greatly value the destination Portugal and take the opportunity to know the city of Porto. The participants of the fashion events held in the city of Porto return to participate, extend the stay, and come accompanied by family and/or friends. Thus, it is important to offer complementary programs. | E4/E5/E6    |
|                              | The support of local and regional DMO’s should not only be limited to promotion but should also include the provision of spaces and other support for the holding of social events, complementary to major fashion events, as well as travel facilities. | E4/E5       |
| Covid-19 consequences        | Covid-19 had a negative impact on the textile sector, but it was reinvented through the production of masks and other hospital textile products. Although the pandemic did not affect the calendar of international fashion events in the fall/winter season, the dates of the spring/summer season, scheduled in October and September 2020, may be affected. | E4          |

Source: Authors
5 Conclusions

Over the years, the number of fashion events held in the city of Oporto has evolved, as well as the number of participants, both domestic and foreign, has increased. The interviews recognize that the participants of the fashion events, in addition to the innovation, presentation, organization and experience of the events, value Portugal, in general, and the city of Oporto, in particular, as tourist destinations and, thus, take advantage of the participation in the event to know the city. Most participants return to participate in subsequent editions of the events, extend their stay and travel with family and/or friends.

The main result of fashion events in the city of Oporto is the evolution of the fashion industry regarding several critical factors of competitiveness, such as design, innovation, quality, and marketing. Over the past few years, both companies and brands of the national textile sector have seen a significant increase in the volume of exports as well as international notoriety. However, the evolution of companies is more significant than the evolution of brands, which have more difficulty asserting themselves in the market. However, the foreign public recognizes the Portuguese textile producing quality, due to the constant innovation of the players in the sector, both in terms of production and promotion.

The main objectives that business associations intend to achieve with the organization of fashion events are to promote the Portuguese textile and clothing industry, both nationally and internationally, to position the city of Oporto on the roadmap of international fashion cities, promote the design and quality of Portuguese fashion products as a competitive advantage and promote the aesthetic revitalization of national fashion. Respondents believe that the creation of partnership between players in the fashion sector, both domestic and international, is essential to the success of the fashion industry in general and fashion events. They recognize, however, that there is still a work to be done, concerning the creation of partnerships, so the potential of events could be maximized and the brand “Portugal” could be truly recognized as a brand of excellence worldwide, as also stated in previous studies [43–45]. Business associations demonstrate the desire to have a greater support from local and regional DMO’s, not only in terms of promotion, but also in the availability of spaces and cost aids for the improvement of fashion events and complementary social events.

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