See Now, Buy Now,

The Future Reality

of Fashion?

Graduation Paper
Disclaimer

1. This report, as part of the graduation project aimed at attaining the BA title from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, has been written and/or compiled solely by me.

2. This project report (or any amended form of it) has never before been submitted by me or anyone else in the framework of a learning assignment aimed at the attainment of a certificate or degree, within the AMFI programme or elsewhere.

3. The work that was necessary for the realisation of this project was performed entirely by me. All the data that have been collected are original.

4. All quotes from other sources are recognisable in the report by quotation marks and the sources of all my information have specifically been indicated.

Date: 13.06.2016

Place: Amsterdam

Name: Quinten Vanpoucke

Signature:
Executive summary

In recent years there have been key challenges that occurred in the current fashion system:

1. A decreasing perception of newness: Technology and social media has made fashion much more accessible to the general public and does not only connect with industry insiders and press anymore. Images and live streams are exposed worldwide in real time. However, collections are not available to purchase for another six months. By the time the designs are displayed in store they are perceived as old-fashioned.

2. Fast fashion brands have gained the ability to deliver copies of designs to the retail floor before the actual designer collections are available.

3. Deliveries are in misalignment with the actual time of the year. This causes items to go on sale when they are actually relevant for the season. Hence, profits are missed.

A proposed answer to this complex situation is the ‘See Now, Buy Now model’ that allows brands to sell their collection almost immediately after it has been showcased on the runway. However, this strategy is mostly talked about and executed by fashion brands with own retail stores, e-commerce operations and production teams.

This research paper seeks to explore the consequences and opportunities the new operating model offers for small designer labels. These brands often depend on wholesale partners and therefore seem in need of the 6 months time in order to deal with the orders, produce and deliver.

The main findings of the research suggests that the most initial form of the See Now, Buy Now model is not the most suitable strategy for small designer labels as they are mainly focused on the process and creativity and do not have the resources for such financial risks. Nevertheless, a hybrid model taking form in capsule-pieces and pre-order events also known as See Now, Buy Now, Wear later seems to be an opportunity for those labels to explore.
Table of content
1.0 Introduction
1.1 Preface

About a year ago, I completed my internship at the studio of the Belgian designer Christian Wijnants. Assisting the general manager with the organisation of the biannual fashion show, I experienced the effort, manpower and money that is invested in the realisation of such an event at first hand. It was at that point in time when I questioned, whether the media buzz the show created would be worth the enormous financial investment. After all, it would take five months before the collection would be launched in the shop, which is why I suspected that the conversion rate might not be directly influenced by the media attention anymore.

On a similar note, brands such as Burberry and Tom Ford have announced to change their present way of operating, stating that they will be taking alternative routes. Starting to research more about what seems to be a subject of heavy discussion at the moment, I examined the unsuitability of the conventional fashion system, current key challenges and how the industry is changing at this very moment. 2016 implies to be the year the fashion industry will undergo some ground breaking revisions.

1.2 Disconnection With The Current Zeitgeist

The world has changed dramatically over the last decade due to globalization, climate change and an overflow of technology (Amed, 2016). However, looking closely at fashion and its underlying operating system, little changes can be noted since the sixties. Yves Saint Laurent and his business partner Pierre Bergé pioneered in establishing ready to wear collections, each sold in their entirety to retailers after being shown on the catwalk (Fogg and Steele, 2013). Thereafter in 1997, Helmut Lang decided, for New York to be the host of the first fashion week of the season, followed by the three other fashion capitals; Paris, Milan and London (Friedman, 2016) and the conventional fashion system was born.

Recently, Vanessa Friedman (2016) from ‘The New York Times’ pinpointed the industry’s main challenge, which she defines as the disconnection with the current zeitgeist in general. Specifically, as we live in a society that embraces social media and the World Wide Web, the communication and promotion of collections, which is immediate versus the availability of the garments and accessories, which is distant is out of kilter. Enormous budgets and a vast amount of energy are being channelled into catwalk shows, which create a buzz and brand awareness at a point in time, which situates itself quite a while before the collections are actually available to the consumer. This often leads to product fatigue, as consumers are overwhelmed with photographs and live streams from runway shows and campaign shots in magazines, resulting in the designs seeming too familiar and possibly out of fashion by the time they are introduced to the shop floor (Friedman, 2016). Furthermore, deliveries seem key in this issue, as consumers want to buy garments eminently, after they have been shown.

The online platform ‘Business of Fashion’ dedicated its last print issue ‘The New World Order’ to starting a conversation with designers and brands such as Tom Ford, Burberry, Azzedine Alaia and Paul Smith (Amed, 2016). These designers all voiced profound dissatisfaction with the current fashion system, stating that they plan to explore different ways of working. They argue that fashion tries to respond to customers’ need for novelty, but in doing so, the industry has created an over-proliferation of products, that do not have enough time on the shop floor before the next collection descends into the shop.
Furthermore, they mention that the current system causes summer goods to be delivered in December and winter goods in June, again leading to sales losses and waste, since items are often times already discounted when the appropriate time of the year starts (Madsen, 2016). This imbalance results in designers being constrained in their creativity, buyers and press being confronted with an unreasonable amount of work and overwhelmed customers.

During the ready to wear Fashion Weeks of A/W16, it became even more apparent to what extent designers are debating the current process. According to a report of ‘Women’s Wear Daily’, the Council of Fashion Designers of America has appointed the Boston Consulting Group to investigate, what is called a ‘broken fashion system’ (Lockwood, 2015). Diane Von Furstenberg, chairman of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, stated that due to the rise of social media such as Instagram and Pinterest showing celebrities and bloggers wearing outfits freshly off the catwalk, consumers are confused and lose the drive to purchase the same garments six months later.

Additionally, the long time period between the show and the availability of garments seems to be ideal for fast fashion retailers such as ‘Inditex Zara’ and ‘Hennes & Mauritz’ (H&M) as they can deliver cheap copies of the designer pieces, only a couple of weeks after they have spotted the garments online (The fashion law. com, 2016). Áslaug Magnúsdóttir, cofounder of online platform Moda Operandi, acknowledges this further by saying that ‘fast fashion companies are knocking off and delivering the latest trends to consumers in a matter of weeks, long before the pieces from actual designer collections arrive in shops months later; by which point they are already yesterday’s news’ (Magnúsdóttir, 2016).

One of the main answers that address this complex situation comes from designers such as Michael Kors, Tom Ford and Rebecca Minkoff: they intend to consider the implementation of a structure which enables clients to purchase the collection on- and offline, immediately after the garments have been showcased on the runway, following the so-called ‘See Now, Buy Now’ principle.

Pioneering brands that try to tackle these issues have an important trait in common: they all desire to be closer to the consumer at a quicker pace. However, this ‘direct-to-consumer strategy’ undoubtedly raises a lot of questions for emerging designers, who are dependent on the wholesale business model (Mellery–Pratt, 2016), since they need to procure sufficient financial resources to be able to produce their designs in the form of traditional pre-payments. In addition, it is important to critically review whether this new strategy may pressure designers in the long run by giving in to society’s constant desire for immediacy. Big brands have sufficient financial resources and vertical integration enabling them to welcome such changes with relative ease. In contrast, a lot of smaller designers are dependent on wholesale partners for distribution and deliver to them after a six-month lead-time between showing, placing orders and production up until now. Therefore, without financial resources or virtual integration, adapting to the see-now-buy-now system seems very ambitious for these brands as of now.

Consequently, it is important to investigate this new model and explore feasible solutions for small designer brands with regard to deliveries, fashion shows and the seasonality of fashion.
With the above factors in mind, this research paper seeks to answer the question:

**In what way does the ‘See Now, Buy Now’ model affect small designer labels?**

To answer this main question I have to ask further questions:

1. Which fashion brands are most affected by the model?

2. Which industry developments provoke the ‘See Now, Buy Now’ model?

3. What are the characteristics of this model?

4. What are the key opportunities and challenges the model entails for small designer brands?

**1.3 Methodology**

This research has been conducted in an exploratory manner, utilizing qualitative analysis methods such as literature review, interviews and conversations (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In order to gain an insight into the effects the See Now, Buy Now model has on small, emerging designer labels, a literature review has been conducted in the scope of chapter two. The results constitute a foundation to my research, pinpointing recent developments in the fashion industry that are responsible for the development of the See Now, Buy Now model. Due to the topicality of the subject, the sources mainly derive from the internet and mostly comprise of business journals and scientific articles.

Within chapter three, I define what the See Now, Buy Now model is examine how it functions. In order to do so, I utilize the recently published report by the Council of Fashion Designers of America in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group, since this is the only official publication on the matter up to date. Additionally, secondary research has been analysed critically in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the matter at hand.

In chapter four and five, I will investigate to what extent the See Now, Buy Now model affects emerging designer labels. Conducting personal interviews with designer Felix Boehm, retail assistant Laurens Meister, fashion lecturer Carolina van Gerven and business consultant Susie Breuer, I explore the matter from multiple points of views. These findings are complemented with the analysis of published interviews, in order to provide for further triangulation of data.

A combination of the findings procured through literature review in combination with secondary research and personal interviews allows me to come to an educated conclusion within the scope of chapter six. On the basis of this, I am able to give an advice for small designer brand affected by the See Now, Buy Now model.
2.0 A Changing Industry
2.1 Defining a segment

Which fashion brands are most affected by the model?

See Now, Buy Now is the contemporary answer to a fashion system that shows a disconnection with how consumers buy nowadays. However, it is a solution that has been mostly considered by big fashion brands, such as Burberry and Prada. Therefore, this paper seeks to outline the positive and negative effects the model has on small designer labels.

In order to provide for a foundation for further discussions, I will subsequently explore the characteristics of small designer labels. The fashion industry is usually subdivided into eight price point categories, ranking from ‘Discount’ to ‘Haute Couture’ (Apparelsearch.com, 2016). This paper will focus on the seventh division know as the ‘Designer segment’, since these brands work with fashion shows and would therefore be directly effected by a change in the conventional fashion system. While some of these designers offer made-to-measure garments, this research focuses on their ‘ready-to-wear’ collections, which are produced in standardized sizes and sold via e-commerce platforms or on the shop floor (Storper and Salais, 1997).

See Now, Buy Now is about clothing being available in the shop immediately after the designs have been shown on the runway. A runway show plays an utterly important role in luxury ready-to-wear fashion industry. Fashion shows have existed since the 1800s and seem to be inseparably related to these brands. Since the 1960s, fashion shows have been used as a marketing tool and nowadays, public visibility and the magnitude of fashion shows have increased and created a celebrity culture (Steele, 2010).

Another interesting point of reference is the current timeline that is linked to the development of luxury ready-to-wear clothing. Referring to the book ‘Blue Is The New Black’ by Susie Breuer (2012), the operating system can be summarised into five phases as visible in figure 1. The first phase comprises of designing and developing the collection by choosing fabrics, trimmings and colour schemes. This is usually followed by the show phase, where designers exhibit their collection in the form of a presentation or on the runway. Afterwards, buyers are invited to the showroom to order the collection so that production can commence. Lastly, the collection arrives on the shop floor, ready to be bought by the end consumer. It is to be expected that this order will shift in accordance with implementing the See Now, Buy Now principal. I will elaborate on this idea through further investigation within the scope of the next chapter.

Fig.1, The Cycle of Conventional Fashion
Susie Breuer, 2012
Concluding, when speaking of small designer brands within this research, they can be identified as fashion enterprises, which operate in the Designer segment and produce ready-to-wear collections that are being shown during a fashion show. These brands often times do not have the budget to open own retail stores and therefore work together with wholesale partners, platforms and agents who sell their collection to the end consumer (Breuer, 2012).

2.2 Industry Developments

Which industry developments provoke the ‘See Now, Buy Now’ model?

So what is the reason the industry has been shaken to its foundations? To answer this question, it is important to consider and evaluate the industry developments that have caused designers to revise the existing system.

Considering the matter from a macro perspective, globalisation has naturally impacted the fashion industry. Globalisation is being defined as the process by which national and regional economies, societies and cultures have become integrated and dominated through the global network of trade, communication, immigration and transportation (Lexicon.ft.com, 2016).

One of the most evident consequences globalisation has led to is the growing volume of employment in developing countries due to cheap labour (Ilo.org, 1996). This has paved the way for high-street retailers to shift the main bulk of production to the developing world, where labour and overhead expenses are only a fraction of those in Europe.

Other relevant factors with regard to the See Now, Buy Now model are more recent globalisation developments. Cross-border digitalisation (Lund, Manyika and Bughin, 2016) allows consumers to have instant access to information and exchange content and services freely and globally (Mayinka et al., 2016). Social media and other Internet platforms further allow individuals to form their own cross border connections. This has led to an empowered digital consumer.

In the following, I will zoom in on two overarching consequences of globalization relevant to the emergence of See Now, Buy Now, being fast fashion and the digital consumer.

2.2.1 Fast Fashion, a MESO Development

Globalisation has facilitated the evolvement of fast fashion. As a next step in my line of research, it is crucial to examine how fast fashion caused the industry to come up with the See Now, Buy Now model.

There are two keys to the success of fast fashion. One clearly is the price, resulting from cheap labour in developing countries and the other reason is the continuous supply of new clothes. Researchers Liz Barnes and Gaynor Lea-Greenwood (2006) argue that mass communication has allowed the consumer to access information about the latest trends, which has changed how people consume clothing nowadays. Consumers are now constantly demanding newness, which results in the fashion industry being pressured to deliver fresh products on a constant basis.
A Cambridge University study states that in 2006, people were buying a third more clothes than they were in 2002 and that on average a woman has four times as many clothes in her wardrobe than she did in 1980 (Ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk, 2016).

High-street retailers have quickly adapted to the changing consumer. Chains such as ‘Inditex Zara’ and ‘Hennes & Mauritz’ (H&M) introduce styles as often as every two weeks, rather than launching lines at the beginning of each season. High-street brands have shifted their competitive advantage from price to fast response to trends by introducing just-in-time, agile supply chains and quick response systems. Due to their highly responsive supply chain, Inditex Zara launches 11,000 new items each year, which enables them to deliver new designs as soon as a trend emerges (The Economist.com, 2005).

On the contrary, high-end fashion designers take a lot more time to source materials, convert them into products and execute quality checks, which leaves a big time span for high street retailers to copy their designs. Also, because of apparel pipelines that are long and complex (Čiarniené and Vienažindienė, 2014), due to fabric production, quality checks and so on, the lifecycle of styles often decreases in time and products are only on the shop floor for a couple of weeks, before ending up in the sales rack.

Online platform ‘The Fashion Law’ (The FashionLaw.com, 2016) describes the current conundrum similarly. The author explains that highstreet retailers, who were able to adjust to the consumer demands propel styles from the runways to the store in only a couple of weeks. By the time the real designer item comes out, they have long lost their sparkle as the latest, trendiest item.

2.2.2 The Digital Consumer, a MICRO Development

On a MICRO level, the relevant change induced by globalisation is the phenomenon of the digital consumer. Social media and technology have made it possible for luxury ready-to-wear brands to interact with consumers, at a much quicker pace, capturing immediate feedback on their products, which in turn results in an increasing involvement and engagement. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest have not only offered brands a new way to connect with their audience, they have also boosted word-of-mouth marketing, as consumers are given the possibility to communicate on an interpersonal basis about products and services (Mohr, 2013).

McKinsey’s report about the digital consumer shows that three out of four purchases, even when they still take place in stores, are influenced by what customers see, do and hear online (Remey, 2015). In other words, it is feasible to state that social media and digitalisation are now the engine of the luxury shopping experience.

When it comes to luxury ready-to-wear fashion, a fourteen billion euro industry, e-commerce plays an important role with regard to the digital consumer. 6% of luxury fashion sales are completed through ecommerce platforms, as visible in the figure below (2).
Additionally, it is important to notice that digital and social media also play an impactful role in the 94% remaining offline sales. Technology is utilised as a tool in order to acquire multiple touch points between the brand and the consumers, who are now given the possibility to be in continuous contact with each other (Kansara, 2016).

According to the retail week report of 2014, social media is becoming a greatly influential tool to stimulate the consumers’ readiness to purchase. Increasingly, the digital consumer uses social media to share looks, new products and new finds. Especially, the millennials, also called the IWWIWWIWI (I want what I want when I want it) generation, are very much occupied with reviewing products, experiences and being online in general. They are constantly connected to social networks and enjoy broadcasting their thoughts and knowhow in order to contribute and give feedback on others. Fashion trend forecasting platform WGSN’s research on the issue shows that the millennial is also more likely to follow fashion advice from bloggers rather than allowing input from friends or family (WGSN, 2012).

It might not come as a surprise that Burberry is one of the first brands executing the See Now, Buy Now principle. The brand has one of the strongest online presences, being one of the most successful brands on social media. Christopher Bailey, executive officer at Burberry stated, ‘we are now as much a media content company as we are a design company’ (Kansara, 2016:25). Furthermore, Burberry, as well as some other marketing driven fashion brands, such as Tom Ford and Michael Kors, try not to make a distinction between online and offline, integrating digital into the core of all their major marketing initiatives.
2.3 Sub-Conclusion

To conclude, both the MESO industry development ‘fast fashion’ and the MICRO development ‘the digital consumer’ have caused the industry to rethink the current fashion system. High-street retailers have gained the ability to deliver interpretations of designs and to retail them before the designer collections that actually inspired them reach the shop floor. Hence, the See Now, Buy Now model seems to be an opportune strategy to implement in order to decrease copying potential.

Furthermore, the changing consumer, who spends endless hours on digital platforms purchasing and reviewing products suggests a reason for designers to examine this direct to consumer strategy. After all, social media platforms implement direct purchasing tools and bloggers link items to web shops.

These advancements hint at the See Now, Buy Now principal being the future reality for fashion.
3.0 The Model & Its Way of Working
3.1. The See Now, Buy Now Model

What are the characteristics of this model?

Having pinpointed the relevant industry developments that have led designers and brands to question the current system in which they show and sell their collections, it is important to evaluate if the See Now, Buy Now model is the right strategy for designer labels in the following. In order to do so, the subsequent chapter reviews the model and explores its impact on the fashion industry.

The See Now, Buy Now principle primarily originates from the business to consumer (B2C) strategy, in which a product or service is exchanged directly from the business to the consumer, either via online or offline channels (Hom, 2013). The See Now, Buy Now strategy takes this principle a step further. The model enables consumers to buy pieces from the collection immediately after they have been showcased on the runway, or at least much quicker than the four to six months standard time frame, which is adopted by most fashion companies to date.

However, it is important to note that the See Now, Buy Now model is executed depending on the company that is applying the strategy. There is no one-size-fits all solution.

In order to successfully implement this model, the Council of Fashion Designers of America, in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group suggests for brands and designers to have intimate meetings with buyers and long-lead press at the beginning of the design process, six months before delivery. This allows buyers to review the collection and place orders so that production can be kicked off in advance (Council Of Fashion Designers Of America, 2016). According to the confederation’s opinion, the See Now, Buy Now model would not pressure the production and manufacturing lead-time, as production would still happen over a period of four to five months.

Besides the intimate meetings between buyers, long-lead press and designers, there is the option for brands to stay relevant throughout the season by organizing a traditional fashion show, for example, with the only difference to the conventional fashion system being that the garments would already be made available right after the show.
More innovative approaches of creating 'in-season relevancy' would be large-scale presentations or collaborative events with wholesale clients. These measures can be executed either on- or offline. As an example, brands can decide to cooperate with a department store such as Barneys or Selfridges in order for end consumers to buy the new, yet unseen collections immediately.

One of the main issues with the current system is that deliveries to the retail shop floor are increasingly out of kilter with the actual season. Consumers tend to buy clothes closer to when they need it and brands and retailers are diminishing full price sales potential, as online/offline stores have already entered the mark down period during relevant moments.

The See Now, Buy Now model would entail to reverse the seasons, so that spring/summer collections would be presented during February and March and the autumn/winter collections in September/October. This way, the time between seeing the collection and being able to buy the collection becomes shorter. Further, the See Now, Buy Now model makes collections more relevant to the time of year and it increases the chance that consumers make a purchase before their desire and need has decreased.

The following figure (3) gives an indication of how this plan of action would be executed. As illustrated, the spring/summer collection would be ordered in September with the production phase following immediately. The collection would then be delivered to the stores in February/March, possibly accompanied by a runway show or presentation during Fashion Week.

![In-season opportunity: What it could mean](image)

Fig. 3, Report Council of Fashion Designers of America, 2016
“It’s fashion rebooting to be in touch with reality, currently there’s instant access to shows but constant deferral. If you can’t buy it immediately you forget about it.”

Sarah Mower; Vogue’s chief editor; 2016
The brand ‘Rebecca Minkoff’ illustrates how these ideas could look like in reality. The American designers’ latest spring /summer labelled ‘#SEEBUYWEAR.Ms.Minkoff’ was shown in February, as opposed to her competitors simultaneously showing their winter collection during Fashion Week. Afterwards, the collection almost immediately made its entry into the stores. To allow this to be possible, Rebecca Minkoff had shown her collection to retailers, buyers and fashion editors in advance, in order for them to make decisions about order quantities and press coverage. Right after the show, the designer started working on her next collection for fall 2016, which will be shown to retailers and editors within the course of the next month (Holmes, 2016).

3.1 Sub-Conclusion

Concerning the third question ‘what are the characteristics of the See Now, Buy Now model, it is possible to conclude that according to the Council of Fashion Designers of America, it implies intimate buyer and press meetings, followed by production up-front, thus, before collection presentations or runway shows. Further, the main goal of the model is to deliver clothes during the relevant time of the year. This way, consumers are more likely to buy full-priced garments rather than waiting for the products to go on sale when they are actually relevant to the time of year.

However, the Council’s research seems to focus primarily on big brands, which have access to vast financial resources in contrast to small designer labels. Hence, it is important to elaborately research this model and its implications for small brands, exploring the opportunities it offers, but also pinpointing the threats it poses to these brands being unable to take risks on a financial or operational level. Therefore, within the scope of the following chapter, I will examine the implications for small designer brands by means of personal interviews and secondary research.
4.0 The Impact on Small Designers
What are the key opportunities and challenges the model entails for small designer brands?

To examine how the See Now, Buy Now model affects smaller designers, it is important to critically review its impact on the different components of the fashion industry, such as collecting, buying, customers, retail and collection presentations.

4.1 Buying

Referring back to the pre-ordering system, which was proposed by the Boston Consulting Group, it is essential to examine the concomitant buying procedure. In an interview I conducted with Carolina Van Gerven (teacher at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute) in 2016, she stated that she does not fully agree with pre-ordering, since “as a brand, you need to be careful with displaying your ideas whilst they are still in the developing phase. Despite the confidentiality agreements with press and buyers, there is always a chance for plagiarism and fraud’.

A second issue that occurs within the field of buying is that pre-ordering would entail that smaller designers would have to move their production upfront with no guarantee of sales. Funding all production upfront is a major cash flow concern, for some young designers that are just starting their business. Áslaug Magnúsdóttir (2016), co-founder of Moda Operandi, further argues that the See Now, Buy Now model makes it harder for designers to sustain in the competitive fashion environment. She mentions that the model’s requirement to order upfront combined with the little knowledge of consumers’ reactions, likes and dislikes, might make retailers less willing to buy into an emerging designer label.

In 2016, I also had an interview with Felix Boehm, assistant designer at Belgian fashion label Veronique Branquinho. An important issue that arose during our conversation was the concern regarding the increasing power of buyers. With intimate buying appointments, orders would be placed before the collection is showcased on the runway, empowering buyers to completely decide upfront what is going to be sold without any consultation of the consumers.

For him, it rather seems like a step backwards instead of forwards. He further argues that he can imagine that this would threaten the unique position of the designer, as buyers might want to have a say in the development of the collection and decide what is shown on the runway. In a way, this represents a return to the pre-internet system, when industry professionals saw collections before the consumers, ignoring the advantages the Internet had to offer (Magnusdottir, 2016).

4.2 Collection Development

Looking at the See Now, Buy Now model from a designer’s perspective raises further questions. When developing a collection from scratch, it appears almost impossible to disrupt the process, as designers need the time to brainstorm, to visualise their ideas and to source materials.

Ruth Chapman (2016), co-founder of e-commerce platform Matches Fashion argues that the See Now, Buy Now model would pressure the procedure, resulting in a compromise of the quality and design of the product (Vogue UK, 2016). She further offers the idea: isn’t the artisanal design process what luxury fashion is all about?
François Henri Pinault, chief executive officer (CEO) of conglomerate ‘Kering’ also expresses his concerns with regard to this new model. He is quoted saying that offering ‘buy now’ collections ‘negates the dream’ of luxury fashion and that the time between a runway show and products arriving on the shop floor ‘creates desire’ (Yotka, 2016). Head of Italy’s National Chamber of Fashion, Carlo Capasa’s (2016) point of view conforms to Pinault’s opinion as he states that ‘the difference between creating a desire and satisfying a need is the difference between slow fashion and fast fashion’ (Justice, 2016).

During an interview in Vogue UK (2016), both the French Fédération Française de la Couture du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode and the Italian Chamber of Fashion position Paris and Milan as fashion capitals known for creativity and manufacturing opposed to London and New York, more known for branding and marketing. According to the two institutes, the See Now, Buy Now model is more suitable for New York and London based designer labels and houses.

Felix Boehm also expects the See Now, Buy Now model to work for certain brands only. For example, ‘Burberry’ has more of a social media savvy customer base that demands immediacy, but other designer labels that are rather focused on the design and creative process have a clientele that is willing to wait.

Though, he is interested in the concept of capsule-collection pieces (including as-yet-unseen catwalk looks) that are delivered immediately or a couple of weeks after the show, followed by the rest of the collection dropped in-store within the course of the following six months. However, this is only possible for ‘mature’ designers that have the budget to fund such pieces.

Carolina Van Gerven also sees advantages in producing some pieces upfront to sell immediately after the fashion show, but stresses that the six months cycle time is definitely needed to educate the consumer and create desire.

The concept of capsule-pieces also occurred during an interview with Laurens Meister (2016), sales assistant and assistant buyer at the multi-brand store SPRMRKT in Amsterdam, which sells emerging and small designer labels. According to Meister, capsule pieces can pose the right balance between direct ‘shopability’ items and special items.

4.3 Consumers

Working in a multi-brand store, Meister was furthermore able to answer some questions with regard to the consumer. According to his judgment, consumers are not keen on purchasing products immediately, since the waiting period makes the products more desirable and tempting.

He argues that creativity takes time and that the ‘educated luxury consumer’ would notice if products are suffering due to an increased production speed. In his opinion, it is only a small group of younger digital savvy consumers that would welcome this new way of working.

Felix Boehm additionally notes that fashion design often works against market trends and that consumers need time to understand the designs’ meaning and relevance. The time between the date of a show and the availability of the designs in-store helps customers to acclimatize to new styles.
4.4 Retail

Another topic that was discussed during the interview with Laurens Meister and Carolina Van Gerven is delivery dates. Both argue that there is definitely room for improvement within this area. Laurens Meister states that it is important to rethink the delivery cadence to match the actual, physical season and boost full price selling.

Laurens Meister gave the example of clothing brand ‘Vetements’ that changed its show dates of the main collection to the pre-collection times, in order for them to have a longer lifecycle on the shop floor. The brand’s main goal is to show the winter collection in January instead of March, between men’s and Couture Fashion Week in Paris, resulting in the collections arriving in store, latest in June. This way, the products are on the shop floor for a significantly longer amount of time (Amed, 2016). Meister argues that this might be an interesting approach for smaller brands.

However, according to Meister, the main problem is that garments’ prices are being discounted at a moment in time when they are actually most relevant to the season of the year. To achieve a better delivery calendar, retailers and brands need to engage in a targeted dialogue. This phenomenon might also be the result of very flexible discounted sales period rules in, for example, the Netherlands or the U.S. The Netherlands have no regulations imposed by the government concerning discount periods and shops are allowed to have clearances throughout the year (Mens-en-samenleving.infonu.nl, 2013). Belgium, on the contrary, has fixed discount periods in order to protect retailers and fashion businesses.

Another interesting solution when it comes to the fashion cycle is the inclusion of more non-season related items. These items are more likely to be sold at full price earlier in the season, as consumers tend to buy garments they are able to wear immediately. On the contrary, they often times wait for the discount period to buy very specific seasonal clothes, such as a winter coat for a lower price. This tendency becomes also apparent when looking at the spending budget of buyers. Almost 80% of their budget is spent on pre-collections, which is generally less seasonal compared to the budget of 20% they typically spend on main collections (Granary.com, 2016).

During an interview with Susie Breuer (2016), author of the book ‘Blue Is The New Black’, she mentioned that consumers have been spoiled by brands that are constantly on sale such as Jcrew, Banana Republic and so on. According to her, the issue is not the delivery times being out of kilter; but rather the expectations concerning price the consumer has developed.
4.5 The Fashion Show

Lastly, it is interesting to look at the future of fashion shows. Felix Boehm’s vision includes smaller presentations and more exclusive events so that people would value fashion again. He thinks that those presentations are the ideal moment for brands to educate their consumer about the product.

Boehm furthermore mentions that he finds the pre-order option, which entails inviting important clients to place their orders immediately after the presentation or show, interesting. For example, he refers to one of his colleagues in the fashion industry, ‘Frederick Hornof’. Hornof is the founder and main designer of his own brand based in Antwerp. The young designer allows his customers to order the items right after the show without the interference of buyers. In doing so, he provides them with a certain degree of exclusivity without speeding up the production process or pressuring his creative development, since the garments still arrive five months later only. A concept he refers to as See Now, Buy Now, Wear Later.

Although many designers are experimenting with the way they show their collections, others still identify with the traditional Fashion Week and runway shows as the main platform to express their vision. The Chamber of Italian Fashion supports this argument and states that Milan Fashion Week grew with a percentage of 12% new-coming designers from the year 2014 to 2015 (Forbes.com, 2016), proving that the concept of the traditional Fashion Week has not come to an end, yet.

4.6 Sub-Conclusion

Regarding question four ‘How does the see now/ buy now model affect small sized designer labels’, it can be concluded that there is a lot of resistance against the See Now, Buy Now model. This is mainly due to the negative implications for smaller designers as its implementation includes taking financial risks. The model might be of value for large, successful and financially secure brands, but the disadvantages outweigh for those being in the early years of business.

However, some of the model’s more interesting aspects for small brands are, for example, a small amount of capsule pieces, which are delivered earlier in the season or immediately after the runway in combination with pieces that are delivered according to the current system. Also, the concept of See Now, Buy Now, Wear Later appears to be interesting to the brands in question. Utilizing this concept, consumers are able to pre-order the pieces at events possibly giving them a feeling of empowerment and exclusivity, while not negatively influencing the production process.

It can be concluded that some brands are generally more suitable for the implementation of the See Now, Buy Now model, while others would not profit from it. Several industry professionals shared their opinion about this and I will discuss these viewpoints in the following chapter.

Please refer to the process book for the four interviews.
5. A New Division in Luxury?
5.1 Marketing-Driven Versus Exclusivity-Driven

A statement that re-occurred during the both personal interviews and secondary research is the connection between the concept of See Now, Buy Now and companies that focus on marketing activities primarily. In order to further clarify this, the brand ‘Balmain’ is taken as an example. The French heritage brand, currently creatively directed by Oliver Rousteing, has jumped on the bandwagon of using Instagram to promote the label (Balmain.com, 2016). Rousteing emphasizes the importance and power of social media and aims to use it as a marketing tool with personality driven content. According to him, social media is the key to generate awareness, to inspire and to create purchasing desire. The Instagram page of ‘Balmain’ counts over 5 million followers and the brand consistently refreshes its page by uploading new photos of garments throughout the day (Instagram.com, 2016). Another contributing element is the brand’s usage of testimonials, such as Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid, wearing the newest outfits straight from the catwalk. The same takes place with brands such as ‘Moschino’ and ‘Burberry’ to name but a few (Euse, 2016).

On the contrary, there are brands like ‘Celine’, ‘Dries Van Noten’ or other smaller labels such as ‘Yang Li’ and ‘Craig Green’, which are not very active on social media and who do not work with testimonials. It is interesting to examine whether the See Now, Buy Now would be a suitable solution for these labels, which have strategically chosen to be less visible and active on social media platforms. Brands that do use social media as their main promotional tool rely on those platforms to sell a lifestyle and they often cater to a much bigger audience. Having a larger scope of customers can therefore result in a higher success rate for the model.

When customers continuously witness the newest outfits of the brands online, it is more likely that they feel the desire to purchase more instantaneously.

5.2 Sub-Conclusion

Therefore, it is can be assumed that See Now, Buy Now might cause a split between two types of luxury brands. On the one hand, there are marketing-driven luxury companies such as ‘Balmain’, ‘Burberry’ and ‘Rebecca Minkoff’ that cater to lifestyle and social media savvy consumers by utilizing the model. On the other hand, there are exclusivity-driven companies who stress the importance of the process and the idea and the depth of the collection instead of online over-exposure.

This does not mean that the See Now, Buy Now model is exclusively suitable for marketing focused designer brands. However, it does seem to be a more appropriate model for these companies.
6.0 Conclusion
In what way does the ‘See Now, Buy Now’ model affect small designer labels?

After having researched the See Now, Buy Now model, the following findings have emerged. See now/buy seems to be a valid model for brands such as Burberry, a company worth around 7.5 billion dollars, with a guaranteed sales presence across the world. Research has proven that the model seems to be more suitable for marketing-driven companies as opposed to emerging designer labels. It can be argued that the model would cause a split in today’s fashion industry and leave a bigger gap between luxury brands focusing on creativity, manufacturing and design on the one hand, and brands focusing on consumer demand and immediate gratification on the other.

See Now, Buy Now’s main disadvantage lies within the field of the designers’ creativity. Designers need the time period of five to six months in order to fully concentrate on the development of the collection without the interference of any other parties. Again, it seems that the model is more suitable for companies consisting of a large design team and not one autonomous designer. When considering ‘pre-ordering’ by buyers, certain questions arise, as smaller brands do not have the resources to pre-finance their collection. One bad season for younger designers could mean financial disaster.

However, the idea of ‘seasonal-buy’ - to better match the delivery calendar to the way people consume - is an idea that seems to be gaining popularity amongst designer retailers and brands. This is definitely something that would be interesting to examine in greater depth in the future. Also, the idea of ‘capsule-pieces’ combined with the ‘classical model’ shows potential, as this would give designers the opportunity to deliver certain items closer to the show date in order to create excitement, scarcity and desire.

To conclude, a hybrid model of the See Now, Buy Now principle, including capsule and seasonal-buy seems to be an opportunity to explore for emerging designers. The original See Now, Buy Now model as of now however seems to be in a too early stage, not fully recognizing the designers’ position in order to fully adapt to.
6.1 Product

On the basis of this research, I have created an online platform that constitutes the accompanying product to this paper. The online platform is a tool that has been developed for young fashion brands to explore the different options with regard to the See Now, Buy Now model. It aims at explaining different scenarios in an engaging way. Brands can go on the website and are informed of the key challenges in today’s fashion industry. However, the website is mostly solution-orientated.

It serves as a consultancy website in which brands are able to acquire the information most suitable for them. To make the website an inspiring tool to work with, the advice comes in the form of audio’s so that the information is explained in accessible language.
6.2 Limitations

While conducting the research several limitations became apparent. Although there are some pioneering brands implementing the See Now, Buy Now model, it is a rather new phenomenon. Hence, there is little to almost no published literature regarding this topic, only secondary data such as business journals and fashion industry related websites. Furthermore, the research is qualitative, accomplished with the help of interviews. I have only interviewed a few industry insiders, so the research represents the opinion of these specific industry professionals alongside my own analysis.

In addition, the research is mainly focused on issues that occur in the field of ready-to-wear women’s wear and its fashion calendar. Menswear would require a different investigation.

This research unveils a huge scope which would benefit from further research. I have mentioned several related subjects in the conclusion that would present nutritious ground for further research.
7.0 Bibliography


