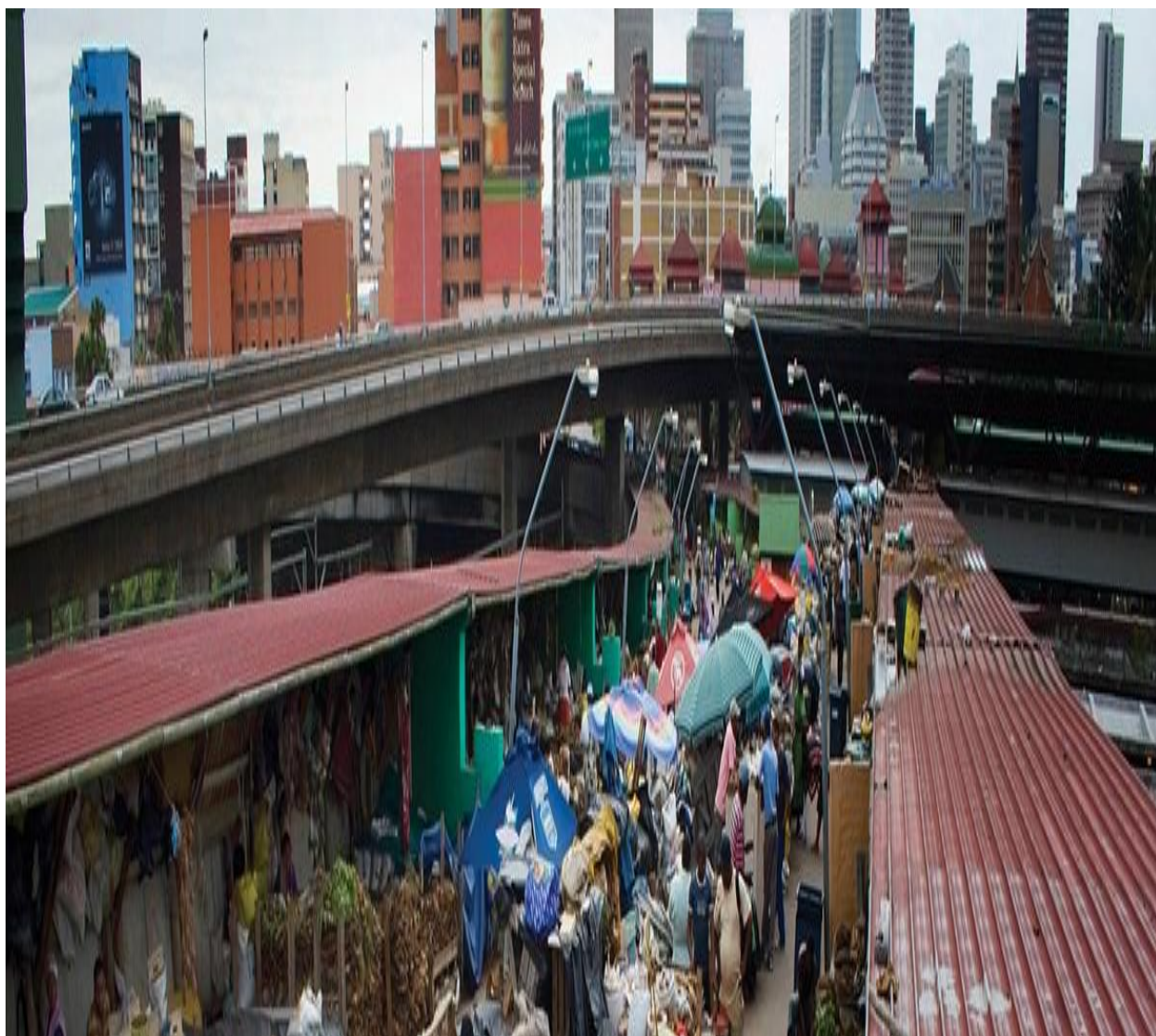


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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Narratives of Traditional Dress in Contemporary Fashion Branding

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This study examines how traditional dress is reinterpreted and utilised as a narrative resource in contemporary fashion branding. Drawing on a qualitative research design based on secondary data, including brand campaigns, digital media content, and industry publications, the research explores how fashion brands construct meanings around heritage, authenticity, sustainability, and identity. Guided by an integrated theoretical framework encompassing cultural capital, symbolic consumption, brand storytelling, authenticity, and glocalisation, the study identifies key narrative strategies that shape consumer perception and engagement. The findings reveal that traditional dress is strategically mobilised to communicate heritage and craftsmanship, enhance brand authenticity, and align with sustainability discourses. Additionally, the study highlights the role of hybridisation in adapting traditional elements for global markets, while also raising concerns about cultural appropriation and ethical representation. The analysis demonstrates that narratives of traditional dress not only contribute to brand differentiation but also facilitate emotional and symbolic connections with consumers. By offering a comprehensive understanding of how tradition is recontextualised in modern branding, this study contributes to the literature on fashion, culture, and consumer behaviour and provides practical insights for ethically grounded branding strategies.

Keywords: traditional dress; fashion branding; cultural capital; brand storytelling; symbolic consumption; sustainability; authenticity

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary global fashion landscape, the interplay between tradition and modernity has become a defining feature of branding strategies. As fashion brands seek differentiation in an increasingly saturated market, narratives rooted in traditional dress have emerged as powerful tools for constructing identity, authenticity, and cultural resonance. Traditional dress, often embedded with historical, social, and symbolic meanings, provides a rich semiotic resource that contemporary brands reinterpret and recontextualise to appeal to both local and global audiences.

The growing interest in cultural heritage within fashion branding is closely tied to broader socio-economic and cultural transformations, including globalisation, digitalisation, and the rise of identity-driven consumption. Consumers today are not merely purchasing products; they are engaging with stories, values, and meanings associated with brands (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In this context, traditional dress serves as a narrative device through which brands communicate authenticity, craftsmanship, and cultural continuity. These narratives often evoke nostalgia, cultural pride, and a sense of belonging, thereby enhancing emotional engagement and brand loyalty.

At the same time, the incorporation of traditional dress into contemporary fashion branding raises critical questions regarding representation, appropriation, and commodification. While some brands aim to celebrate and preserve cultural heritage,

others may engage in superficial or exploitative uses of traditional elements, leading to ethical concerns and cultural tensions (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The tension between cultural appreciation and appropriation has become particularly salient in the era of social media, where consumers are increasingly vocal and aware of issues related to cultural sensitivity and authenticity.

The concept of narrative is central to understanding how traditional dress is mobilised within fashion branding. Narratives function as structured forms of meaning-making that allow brands to connect products with broader cultural and symbolic frameworks (Escalas, 2004). Through storytelling, brands can transform garments into carriers of history, identity, and values. For instance, the use of indigenous textiles, traditional craftsmanship techniques, or culturally specific motifs can be framed within narratives that emphasise heritage, sustainability, and ethical production. These narratives not only differentiate brands but also align them with contemporary consumer values such as authenticity, sustainability, and social responsibility.

Furthermore, the resurgence of interest in traditional dress can be linked to the growing emphasis on sustainability within the fashion industry. Fast fashion has been widely criticised for its environmental and social impacts, leading to a shift toward more sustainable and ethical practices (Fletcher, 2014). Traditional dress, often characterised by durable materials, artisanal production methods, and cultural significance, aligns with the principles of slow fashion. By incorporating traditional elements, brands

can position themselves as environmentally conscious and socially responsible, thereby appealing to ethically minded consumers.

From a theoretical perspective, the study of traditional dress narratives in fashion branding intersects with several academic domains, including cultural studies, consumer behaviour, and branding theory. Concepts such as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), symbolic consumption (Belk, 1988), and brand storytelling (Fog et al., 2010) provide valuable frameworks for analysing how traditional dress is utilised to create meaning and value. These perspectives highlight the role of culture and symbolism in shaping consumer perceptions and experiences.

Despite the growing prevalence of traditional dress in contemporary fashion branding, there remains a need for systematic academic inquiry into how these narratives are constructed, communicated, and received. Much of the existing literature has focused on specific case studies or regional contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the broader patterns and implications of this phenomenon. In particular, there is limited research on how secondary data sources—such as brand campaigns, digital media, and industry reports—can be analysed to uncover the narratives embedded in fashion branding.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the narratives of traditional dress in contemporary fashion branding through a qualitative analysis of secondary data. By examining how brands incorporate and communicate traditional elements, the research seeks to identify key themes, strategies, and implications for both theory

and practice. The study also contributes to ongoing debates on cultural representation, authenticity, and sustainability in the fashion industry.

In summary, the integration of traditional dress into contemporary fashion branding represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that reflects broader cultural, economic, and technological dynamics. By analysing the narratives associated with traditional dress, this research seeks to deepen our understanding of how fashion brands construct meaning and engage with cultural heritage in a globalised world.

2. Literature Review

Traditional dress has long been recognised as a significant marker of cultural identity, reflecting the values, beliefs, and social structures of a community. Anthropological and sociological studies have emphasised the role of clothing as a form of non-verbal communication that conveys information about identity, status, and belonging (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). Traditional garments are often deeply embedded in cultural rituals, historical narratives, and collective memory, making them powerful symbols of cultural continuity.

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital provides a useful lens for understanding the value associated with traditional dress. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and cultural competencies that individuals acquire through socialisation. In the context of fashion, traditional dress can be seen as a form of embodied cultural capital that signals authenticity and cultural

knowledge. Brands that incorporate traditional elements may thus leverage this cultural capital to enhance their legitimacy and appeal.

However, the meaning of traditional dress is not static; it evolves over time and across contexts. In contemporary societies, traditional garments are often reinterpreted and adapted to fit modern lifestyles and aesthetic preferences (Crane, 2000). This dynamic nature of traditional dress allows it to be integrated into contemporary fashion while retaining its cultural significance.

2.1 Fashion Branding and Narrative Construction

Branding in the fashion industry has increasingly shifted from a focus on functional attributes to symbolic and experiential dimensions. Brand narratives play a crucial role in this transformation by providing a coherent and engaging story that connects products with broader meanings and values (Fog et al., 2010). Narratives enable brands to differentiate themselves, build emotional connections with consumers, and create a sense of authenticity.

Escalas (2004) argues that narrative processing is a fundamental aspect of consumer behaviour, as individuals use stories to make sense of their experiences and form connections with brands. In the context of fashion, narratives often draw on themes such as heritage, craftsmanship, and identity. Traditional dress provides a rich source of narrative content that can be used to construct compelling brand stories.

The concept of brand authenticity is particularly relevant in this context.

Authenticity is often associated with originality, sincerity, and a connection to tradition (Beverland, 2005). By incorporating traditional dress elements, brands can signal authenticity and differentiate themselves from mass-produced fashion. However, authenticity is not inherent; it is constructed through narratives and consumer perceptions.

2.2 Cultural Appropriation and Ethical Considerations

The use of traditional dress in fashion branding is not without controversy. Cultural appropriation, defined as the adoption of elements from one culture by members of another culture without appropriate understanding or respect, has become a critical issue in the fashion industry (Rogers, 2006). Critics argue that the commodification of traditional dress can lead to the exploitation and misrepresentation of marginalised cultures.

Venkatesh et al. (2013) highlight the tension between cultural appreciation and appropriation, noting that the line between the two is often blurred. While some brands engage in collaborative and respectful practices, others may use traditional elements in ways that strip them of their cultural significance. This can result in backlash from consumers and damage to brand reputation.

Ethical fashion practices, including fair trade, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement, have been proposed as ways to address these concerns (Fletcher, 2014). Brands that work directly with artisans and communities can create more equitable and respectful relationships, thereby enhancing

the authenticity and ethical credibility of their narratives.

2.3 Sustainability and the Revival of Tradition

The growing emphasis on sustainability in the fashion industry has contributed to the renewed interest in traditional dress. Traditional garments are often produced using environmentally friendly materials and techniques, such as natural dyes and handcrafting (Gwilt, 2014). These practices align with the principles of sustainable fashion, which emphasise durability, ethical production, and reduced environmental impact.

The concept of slow fashion, introduced by Fletcher (2014), advocates for a more mindful and sustainable approach to clothing consumption. Traditional dress, with its emphasis on quality and cultural significance, fits well within this framework. By incorporating traditional elements, brands can promote sustainability while also preserving cultural heritage.

Moreover, the integration of traditional dress into contemporary fashion can support local economies and artisanal communities. This not only contributes to economic sustainability but also helps to preserve traditional skills and knowledge that might otherwise be lost.

2.4 Globalisation and Hybridisation in Fashion

Globalisation has played a significant role in shaping contemporary fashion, facilitating the exchange of cultural ideas and practices across borders. This has led to the emergence

of hybrid fashion forms that combine elements from different cultural traditions (Craik, 2009). Traditional dress is often reinterpreted in this process, resulting in new and innovative designs.

However, globalisation also raises concerns about cultural homogenisation and the loss of cultural diversity. While hybridisation can lead to creative innovation, it can also dilute the distinctiveness of traditional dress. Brands must therefore navigate the tension between global appeal and cultural specificity.

Digital media has further accelerated the globalisation of fashion, enabling brands to reach a global audience and share their narratives widely. Social media platforms, in particular, have become important channels for storytelling and consumer engagement. Through visual and textual content, brands can communicate the cultural and symbolic meanings associated with traditional dress.

2.5 Research Gap and Contribution

Despite the extensive literature on fashion branding, cultural identity, and sustainability, there remains a gap in understanding how narratives of traditional dress are constructed and communicated in contemporary branding. Most studies have focused on primary data or specific case studies, with limited attention to the analysis of secondary data sources.

This study addresses this gap by employing a qualitative methodology based on secondary data, including brand campaigns, digital content, and industry reports. By analysing these sources, the research aims to identify common themes and strategies in the use of

traditional dress narratives. The study also contributes to theoretical discussions on branding, culture, and sustainability, providing insights that are relevant to both academics and practitioners.

3. Theoretical Framework

The exploration of traditional dress narratives in contemporary fashion branding requires a multidimensional theoretical framework that integrates perspectives from cultural theory, consumer behaviour, and branding studies. This study draws primarily on cultural capital theory, symbolic consumption theory, and brand storytelling theory, complemented by insights from authenticity theory and globalisation. Together, these frameworks provide a robust lens through which the construction, communication, and interpretation of traditional dress narratives can be critically examined.

3.1 Cultural Capital and the Value of Tradition

The concept of cultural capital, introduced by Bourdieu (1984), is central to understanding how traditional dress functions as a resource in fashion branding. Cultural capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and symbolic assets that individuals and institutions use to establish distinction and social positioning. In the context of fashion, traditional dress embodies a form of cultural capital that signals heritage, authenticity, and cultural literacy.

Fashion brands strategically mobilise this cultural capital by incorporating traditional elements—such as textiles, patterns, and

craftsmanship—into their collections and narratives. By doing so, they not only differentiate themselves in a competitive market but also align their identities with notions of authenticity and cultural depth. Consumers, in turn, may interpret these signals as indicators of quality, ethical production, and cultural sensitivity, thereby enhancing the perceived value of the brand (Beverland, 2005).

Moreover, cultural capital operates at both individual and collective levels. While consumers may use traditional dress-inspired products to express personal identity and taste, brands simultaneously construct collective narratives that resonate with broader cultural communities. This dual function underscores the importance of cultural capital in bridging the gap between production and consumption.

3.2 Symbolic Consumption and Identity Construction

Symbolic consumption theory provides further insight into how traditional dress narratives influence consumer behaviour. According to Belk (1988), consumers use products not only for their functional utility but also for their symbolic meanings. Clothing, in particular, serves as a powerful medium for self-expression and identity construction.

Traditional dress elements embedded in contemporary fashion carry rich symbolic meanings related to heritage, belonging, and authenticity. When consumers engage with these products, they are effectively participating in a process of identity construction that extends beyond the material

object. For instance, wearing garments inspired by traditional dress may allow individuals to express cultural pride, align with ethical values, or signal cosmopolitan awareness.

Escalas and Bettman (2005) further argue that consumers form connections with brands through self-referencing and narrative processing. In this context, brand narratives that incorporate traditional dress can facilitate deeper emotional engagement by enabling consumers to integrate these narratives into their own life stories. This process enhances brand attachment and loyalty, as consumers perceive the brand as an extension of their identity.

3.3 Brand Storytelling and Narrative Meaning-Making

Brand storytelling theory emphasises the role of narratives in creating and communicating brand meaning. Fog et al. (2010) define storytelling as a strategic tool that enables brands to convey values, build emotional connections, and differentiate themselves in the marketplace. In the fashion industry, storytelling is particularly important due to the symbolic and experiential nature of products.

Traditional dress provides a rich source of narrative content that can be leveraged in brand storytelling. Elements such as historical origins, artisanal techniques, and cultural symbolism can be woven into compelling stories that enhance the perceived authenticity and uniqueness of the brand. These narratives often draw on themes of heritage, craftsmanship, and sustainability,

aligning with contemporary consumer values.

Escalas (2004) highlights that narrative processing allows consumers to become immersed in brand stories, leading to stronger emotional and cognitive connections. When brands effectively integrate traditional dress into their storytelling, they create a sense of continuity between the past and the present, thereby enriching the consumer experience.

However, the effectiveness of brand storytelling depends on the coherence and credibility of the narrative. Inconsistent or superficial use of traditional elements may undermine authenticity and lead to consumer scepticism. Therefore, brands must carefully construct and communicate their narratives to ensure alignment with their identity and values.

3.4 Authenticity and Ethical Representation

Authenticity is a key construct in the theoretical framework, particularly in relation to the use of traditional dress. Beverland (2005) conceptualises brand authenticity as a socially constructed perception that is influenced by factors such as heritage, craftsmanship, and sincerity. In the context of traditional dress, authenticity is often associated with genuine cultural representation and ethical engagement with source communities.

The incorporation of traditional elements into fashion branding raises important questions of authenticity and representation. While some brands engage in meaningful collaborations with artisans and communities, others may adopt a more

superficial approach that prioritises aesthetics over cultural significance. This distinction has significant implications for consumer perceptions and brand credibility.

Consumers increasingly value transparency and ethical practices, particularly in the context of sustainability and cultural sensitivity (Fletcher, 2014). As a result, brands that demonstrate a genuine commitment to preserving traditional cultures are more likely to be perceived as authentic. Conversely, perceived cultural appropriation can lead to reputational damage and consumer backlash.

3.5 Glocalisation and Hybrid Identity Formation

The concept of glocalisation, which refers to the adaptation of global products to local cultures, provides an additional lens for understanding traditional dress narratives in contemporary fashion branding (Robertson, 1995). In a globalised fashion industry, brands must balance the need for global appeal with the preservation of cultural specificity.

Traditional dress often undergoes processes of hybridisation, where elements from different cultural contexts are combined to create new forms of expression (Craik, 2009). This hybridisation reflects the dynamic nature of culture and allows brands to innovate while maintaining a connection to tradition. However, it also raises questions about the preservation of cultural integrity and the potential for homogenization.

Glocalisation enables brands to tailor their narratives to diverse audiences, thereby enhancing relevance and engagement. For

example, a brand may emphasise local heritage in one market while highlighting global influences in another. This flexibility underscores the importance of narrative construction in navigating the complexities of globalisation.

3.5 Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives

The integration of cultural capital, symbolic consumption, brand storytelling, authenticity, and glocalisation provides a comprehensive framework for analysing traditional dress narratives in fashion branding. These theories collectively highlight the interplay between culture, identity, and market dynamics, offering valuable insights into how meaning is constructed and communicated.

By applying this theoretical framework, the study seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which traditional dress is transformed into a strategic branding resource. The framework also facilitates a critical examination of the ethical and cultural implications of this transformation, thereby contributing to both academic discourse and industry practice.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the narratives of traditional dress in contemporary fashion branding. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of meanings, symbols, and interpretations associated with cultural and branding phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the exploratory nature of the research, a qualitative approach enables the

identification of patterns and themes that may not be captured through quantitative methods.

The research is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the subjective construction of meaning and the importance of context in understanding social phenomena. This paradigm aligns with the study's focus on narratives and cultural representation, as it allows for a nuanced analysis of how traditional dress is interpreted and communicated within fashion branding.

4.1 Data Source and Secondary Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data sources, which include:

- Brand websites and official campaigns
- Social media content (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, YouTube)
- Fashion industry reports and publications
- Online articles, interviews, and press releases
- Visual materials such as advertisements and lookbooks

Secondary data is particularly valuable for this research as it provides access to a wide range of real-world examples of fashion branding practices. It also allows for the analysis of publicly available content that reflects how brands present themselves to consumers.

The selection of data sources is guided by purposive sampling, a non-probability

sampling technique that involves selecting cases based on their relevance to the research objectives (Patton, 2002). Brands that prominently incorporate traditional dress elements into their branding are identified and included in the analysis. This approach ensures that the data is rich in information and directly relevant to the research questions.

4.2 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The collected data is analysed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is particularly appropriate for this study as it allows for the systematic examination of narratives and meanings embedded in textual and visual content.

The analysis follows a six-phase process:

- **Familiarisation with the data:** Reviewing and organising the collected materials.
- **Generating initial codes:** Identifying key concepts and recurring elements related to traditional dress narratives.
- **Searching for themes:** Grouping codes into broader themes, such as authenticity, heritage, sustainability, and identity.
- **Reviewing themes:** Refining and validating the identified themes.
- **Defining and naming themes:** Clearly articulating the meaning and scope of each theme.
- **Producing the report:** Integrating the findings into a coherent narrative.

This systematic approach ensures rigour and transparency in the analysis, enhancing the credibility of the research.

4.3 Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure the quality and credibility of the research, the study adopts criteria for trustworthiness as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

- **Credibility** is achieved through careful selection of data sources and thorough analysis.
- **Transferability** is supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and findings.
- **Dependability** is ensured through a clear and systematic research process.
- **Confirmability** is maintained by grounding interpretations in the data and minimising researcher bias.

Additionally, triangulation is employed by analysing multiple types of data sources, including textual and visual materials. This enhances the robustness of the findings by providing multiple perspectives on the research topic.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

As the study is based on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical considerations remain important, particularly in relation to the use and interpretation of cultural content.

The research adheres to ethical guidelines (Mannan & Farhana, 2026):

- Using publicly available data sources
- Properly citing all sources in accordance with APA (7th edition) standards
- Respecting cultural contexts and avoiding misrepresentation
- Maintaining objectivity and academic integrity

Given the sensitive nature of cultural representation, the study also takes care to critically evaluate the ethical implications of fashion branding practices, particularly cultural appropriation and authenticity.

4.5 Limitations of the Methodology

While the use of secondary data offers several advantages, it also has limitations. The analysis is dependent on the availability and quality of existing data, which may vary across sources. Additionally, the absence of primary data means that the study does not capture direct consumer perspectives or insider views from industry practitioners.

Despite these limitations, the qualitative analysis of secondary data provides valuable insights into the narratives constructed by fashion brands. Future research may build on this study by incorporating primary data methods, such as interviews or surveys, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

5. Findings & Analysis

This section presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis of secondary data, focusing on how contemporary fashion brands construct and communicate narratives of traditional dress. The analysis reveals five

dominant themes: heritage and authenticity, craftsmanship and artisanal value, sustainability and ethical positioning, identity construction and cultural symbolism, and hybridisation and global appeal. These themes collectively demonstrate how traditional dress is strategically mobilised as a narrative resource in fashion branding.

5.1 Heritage and Authenticity as Core Narrative Constructs

One of the most prominent findings is the centrality of heritage and authenticity in brand narratives. Fashion brands frequently frame traditional dress as a symbol of historical continuity and cultural depth. Through storytelling techniques, brands highlight the origins of specific garments, textiles, and motifs, often linking them to particular regions, communities, or historical periods.

This narrative strategy aligns with Beverland's (2005) conceptualisation of authenticity as a socially constructed perception rooted in heritage and sincerity. By emphasising historical lineage, brands position themselves as custodians of tradition, thereby enhancing their credibility and differentiation in a competitive market. For instance, brand communications often include references to "centuries-old techniques" or "heritage craftsmanship," which serve to authenticate the product and elevate its perceived value.

Moreover, authenticity is reinforced through visual storytelling. Imagery depicting traditional settings, artisans at work, or culturally significant environments contributes to the construction of a coherent

and immersive narrative. These visual elements complement textual descriptions, creating a multisensory experience that resonates with consumers (Escalas, 2004).

However, the analysis also reveals variability in how authenticity is constructed. While some brands provide detailed and context-rich narratives, others rely on vague or generalised references to tradition. This inconsistency can affect consumer perceptions, as authenticity is contingent upon the credibility and specificity of the narrative.

5.2 Craftsmanship and Artisanal Value

A second key theme is the emphasis on craftsmanship and artisanal production. Traditional dress is frequently associated with skilled manual labour, intricate techniques, and attention to detail. Brands leverage these associations to differentiate their products from mass-produced fashion, positioning them as unique and high-quality.

This emphasis on craftsmanship reflects the broader shift toward experiential and symbolic value in consumer behaviour (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). By highlighting the labour-intensive processes involved in creating traditional garments, brands add a layer of narrative depth that enhances the consumer experience. The product becomes more than a material object; it becomes a story of human skill and cultural heritage.

The analysis indicates that brands often incorporate behind-the-scenes content, such as videos and interviews with artisans, to reinforce this narrative. These materials provide transparency and authenticity,

allowing consumers to connect with the people and processes behind the product. This aligns with the growing consumer demand for transparency and ethical production (Fletcher, 2014).

Furthermore, the focus on craftsmanship contributes to the perception of scarcity and exclusivity. Limited production runs, handcrafted details, and unique variations are presented as indicators of value, appealing to consumers seeking distinctive and meaningful products. This strategy is consistent with the principles of symbolic consumption, where the value of a product is derived from its meaning rather than its utility (Belk, 1988).

5.3 Sustainability and Ethical Positioning

Sustainability emerges as a significant theme in the narratives of traditional dress. Brands increasingly frame traditional practices as inherently sustainable, emphasising the use of natural materials, low-impact production methods, and long-lasting designs. This narrative aligns with the principles of slow fashion, which advocate for mindful consumption and environmental responsibility (Fletcher, 2014).

The analysis reveals that sustainability is often intertwined with heritage and craftsmanship. For example, traditional dyeing techniques and handweaving processes are presented not only as cultural practices but also as environmentally friendly alternatives to industrial production. This dual framing enhances the appeal of traditional dress by linking it to contemporary concerns about sustainability.

In addition to environmental considerations, ethical issues related to labour and community engagement are also highlighted. Brands frequently emphasise fair wages, safe working conditions, and partnerships with local artisans. These narratives serve to position the brand as socially responsible and ethically conscious.

However, the analysis also identifies potential challenges in this area. The use of sustainability narratives may sometimes be superficial or inconsistent, raising concerns about “greenwashing.” Without clear evidence or transparency, such claims may undermine consumer trust. Therefore, the credibility of sustainability narratives depends on the extent to which they are supported by verifiable practices.

5.4 Identity Construction and Cultural Symbolism

Traditional dress plays a crucial role in identity construction, both at the individual and collective levels. The analysis shows that brands use traditional elements to evoke cultural symbolism and facilitate consumer self-expression. These narratives often emphasise themes of belonging, pride, and cultural continuity.

From a symbolic consumption perspective, clothing serves as a medium through which individuals construct and communicate their identities (Belk, 1988). Traditional dress-inspired products enable consumers to engage with cultural narratives, whether by reconnecting with their heritage or expressing an appreciation for diverse cultures.

The data also indicates that brands strategically target different identity dimensions. For example, some narratives emphasise national or regional identity, while others focus on global or cosmopolitan identities. This flexibility allows brands to appeal to a wide range of consumers, from those seeking cultural rootedness to those embracing cultural hybridity.

Moreover, the use of traditional dress in branding contributes to the construction of collective identity. By promoting shared cultural symbols and narratives, brands can foster a sense of community among consumers. This communal aspect enhances brand loyalty and engagement, as consumers feel connected not only to the brand but also to a broader cultural context.

5.5 Hybridisation and Global Appeal

The final theme identified in the analysis is the hybridisation of traditional and contemporary elements. In a globalised fashion industry, brands often reinterpret traditional dress to align with modern aesthetics and consumer preferences. This process results in hybrid designs that combine cultural authenticity with contemporary relevance.

Hybridisation reflects the concept of glocalisation, where global and local influences intersect to create new cultural forms (Robertson, 1995). The analysis shows that brands adapt traditional elements in various ways, such as modifying silhouettes, incorporating modern materials, or blending motifs from different cultures.

This approach enables brands to expand their reach and appeal to diverse markets. By presenting traditional dress in a contemporary context, brands make it accessible to consumers who may not have a direct cultural connection to the original tradition. At the same time, the preservation of key elements ensures that the cultural significance is not entirely lost.

However, hybridisation also raises questions of cultural integrity and authenticity. The balance between innovation and preservation is delicate, and missteps can lead to accusations of cultural appropriation or dilution. The analysis suggests that successful hybridisation requires a deep understanding of the cultural context and a respectful approach to adaptation.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the role of traditional dress narratives in contemporary fashion branding. This section interprets these findings in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature, highlighting key implications for theory, practice, and future research.

6.1 Reinterpreting Cultural Capital in Fashion Branding

The findings reinforce the relevance of Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital in understanding the value of traditional dress in fashion branding. By incorporating traditional elements, brands effectively transform cultural heritage into a form of symbolic capital that enhances their market positioning.

However, the study extends this concept by demonstrating how cultural capital is actively constructed and mediated through narratives. Rather than being a static resource, cultural capital is dynamically produced through storytelling, visual representation, and consumer interpretation. This aligns with contemporary perspectives that emphasise the performative and relational nature of culture.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that cultural capital operates in a global context, and consumers from diverse backgrounds engage with traditional dress narratives. This highlights the need to consider transnational dimensions of cultural capital, particularly in an increasingly interconnected fashion industry.

6.2 Symbolic Consumption and Emotional Engagement

The analysis underscores the importance of symbolic consumption in shaping consumer behaviour. Traditional dress narratives provide rich symbolic content that enables consumers to construct and express their identities. This supports Belk's (1988) assertion that possessions are integral to the extended self.

The study also highlights the role of narrative processing in facilitating emotional engagement. As Escalas (2004) suggests, narratives allow consumers to immerse themselves in brand stories and form meaningful connections. The use of traditional dress enhances this process by adding layers of cultural and historical significance.

Importantly, the findings indicate that emotional engagement is not solely driven by aesthetics but also by values such as authenticity, sustainability, and ethical responsibility. This suggests a shift in consumer priorities toward more meaningful and value-driven consumption.

6.3 Authenticity as a Strategic and Ethical Imperative

Authenticity emerges as a central theme in both the findings and the theoretical framework. The study confirms that authenticity is a key driver of brand perception and consumer trust (Beverland, 2005). However, it also reveals the complexities and challenges associated with constructing authentic narratives.

The variability in authenticity across brands highlights the importance of credibility and transparency. Superficial or inconsistent narratives may lead to scepticism and undermine brand integrity. This underscores the need for brands to adopt a holistic approach to authenticity that encompasses not only storytelling but also practices and values.

From an ethical perspective, the study raises important questions about cultural representation and appropriation. The use of traditional dress requires a careful balance between appreciation and exploitation. Brands must engage with cultural communities in respectful and equitable ways, ensuring that their narratives are grounded in genuine understanding and collaboration.

6.4 Sustainability and the Reinvention of Tradition

The integration of sustainability into traditional dress narratives reflects broader trends in the fashion industry. The findings support Fletcher's (2014) argument that traditional practices offer valuable insights for sustainable fashion.

However, the study also highlights the need for critical evaluation of sustainability claims. While traditional methods may be inherently sustainable, their representation in branding must be accurate and transparent. The risk of greenwashing underscores the importance of aligning narratives with practices.

The reinvention of tradition in the context of sustainability also raises interesting theoretical questions. It suggests that tradition is not merely a relic of the past but a dynamic resource that can be adapted to address contemporary challenges. This perspective challenges the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, emphasising their interdependence.

6.5 Hybridisation, Glocalisation, and Cultural Dynamics

The theme of hybridisation provides valuable insights into the cultural dynamics of contemporary fashion. The findings illustrate how traditional dress is transformed through processes of adaptation and reinterpretation, resulting in new forms of expression.

This supports the concept of glocalisation (Robertson, 1995), highlighting the interplay between global and local influences. However, the study also emphasises the need

to consider the ethical and cultural implications of hybridisation. The balance between innovation and preservation is critical, as excessive modification may lead to the loss of cultural meaning.

The discussion also points to the role of digital media in facilitating hybridisation. Social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination and reinterpretation of traditional dress, creating new opportunities for creativity and engagement. At the same time, they amplify the risks of misrepresentation and cultural insensitivity.

6.6 Implications for Theory and Practice

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by integrating multiple frameworks to analyse traditional dress narratives. It demonstrates the value of combining cultural, consumer, and branding theories to capture the complexity of the phenomenon.

For practitioners, the findings offer several practical insights:

- The importance of authentic and coherent storytelling
- The value of transparency and ethical engagement
- The potential of traditional dress to enhance brand differentiation
- The need to balance global appeal with cultural specificity

By adopting these principles, brands can effectively leverage traditional dress narratives while maintaining ethical and cultural integrity.

6.7 Future Research Directions

The study identifies several avenues for future research. First, there is a need for empirical studies that incorporate primary data, such as consumer interviews or surveys, to validate and extend the findings. Second, comparative studies across different cultural contexts could provide deeper insights into the variability of traditional dress narratives.

Finally, the role of emerging technologies, such as digital fashion and virtual reality, in shaping traditional dress narratives warrants further investigation. These technologies have the potential to transform how cultural heritage is represented and experienced in the fashion industry.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored the narratives of traditional dress in contemporary fashion branding, demonstrating how cultural heritage is transformed into a strategic resource for meaning-making, differentiation, and consumer engagement. By employing a qualitative methodology based on secondary data, the research has identified key themes that underpin brand narratives, including heritage and authenticity, craftsmanship, sustainability, identity construction, and hybridisation. These findings highlight the multifaceted role of traditional dress as both a cultural symbol and a commercial asset within the global fashion industry.

The study contributes to theoretical discourse by integrating perspectives from cultural capital theory, symbolic consumption, and brand storytelling. It shows that traditional

dress is not merely a static representation of the past but a dynamic and adaptable element that can be reinterpreted to align with contemporary values and market demands. In particular, the emphasis on authenticity and sustainability reflects broader shifts in consumer behaviour toward more meaningful and ethically conscious consumption. The findings also extend existing theories by illustrating how narratives actively construct and mediate cultural value in branding contexts.

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the importance of authenticity, transparency, and ethical engagement in the use of traditional dress. Brands that successfully integrate traditional elements into their narratives tend to demonstrate a deep understanding of cultural contexts and a commitment to responsible practices. Conversely, superficial or insensitive use of traditional dress may lead to reputational risks and consumer backlash. Therefore, fashion brands must carefully navigate the balance between innovation and cultural preservation.

The study also highlights the significance of globalisation and digital media in shaping contemporary fashion narratives. The hybridisation of traditional and modern elements enables brands to appeal to diverse audiences, but it also necessitates careful consideration of cultural integrity. As the fashion industry continues to evolve, the role of traditional dress in branding is likely to become increasingly complex and contested.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which does not capture direct consumer perspectives.

Future research could build on these findings by incorporating primary data methods and exploring cross-cultural variations in greater depth. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how traditional dress narratives function in contemporary fashion branding, offering valuable insights for both academic research and industry practice.

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