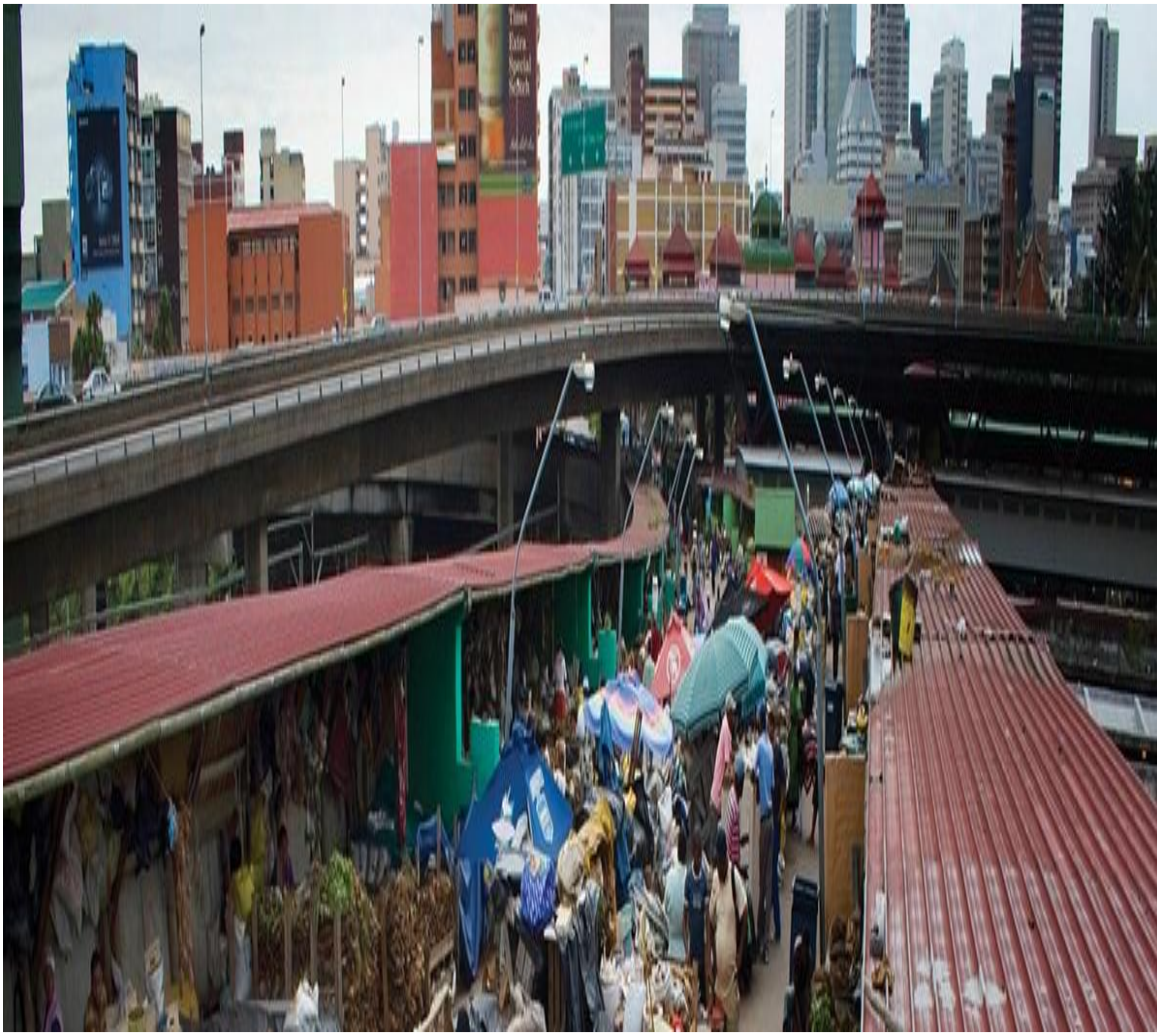
JOURNAL OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS

Volume: 6 Issue: 3
(July-September), 2026
(ISSN: 2791-2604)



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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Market Segmentation Narratives in Fashion Industry Reports

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This study examines the construction and implications of market segmentation narratives in fashion industry reports, positioning segmentation as both an analytical tool and a narrative practice. Drawing on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates market segmentation theory, narrative theory, and discursive constructionism, the research adopts a qualitative methodology based on secondary data analysis of leading industry reports. The findings reveal that segmentation is communicated through personalised consumer archetypes, moralised consumption categories, and technologically framed narratives, which collectively shape how markets and consumers are understood. These narratives not only simplify complex data but also construct consumer identities, reinforce cultural values, and influence strategic decision-making within the fashion industry. The study further highlights the ethical and discursive implications of segmentation practices, including issues of representation, inclusivity, and data-driven bias. By reframing segmentation as a narrative and performative process, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of its role in contemporary marketing communication. The study offers both theoretical insights and practical implications for developing more nuanced, transparent, and responsible segmentation strategies in the evolving fashion landscape.

Keywords: market segmentation; fashion industry; narrative analysis; consumer identity; discourse; sustainability; data-driven marketing

Journal of Formal and Informal Sectors (2026), 6(3); **https://doi.org/10.64907/xkmf.v6i3.jfis.9**

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Received: 2 May 2026 Revised: 25 June 2026 Accepted: 25 June 2026 Published 3 July 2026

1. Introduction

The global fashion industry has undergone significant structural and communicative transformations over the past two decades, driven by globalisation, digitalisation, and shifting consumer values. Within this dynamic environment, market segmentation has emerged as a fundamental strategic tool, enabling fashion brands to identify, target, and communicate with distinct consumer groups. Beyond its traditional function as a marketing technique, segmentation increasingly operates as a narrative device in fashion industry reports, shaping how brands construct, interpret, and present their markets to stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Wedel & Kamakura, 2012).

Market segmentation refers to the process of dividing a heterogeneous market into smaller, relatively homogeneous groups based on shared characteristics such as demographics, psychographics, behaviours, and lifestyles (Smith, 1956). In the fashion industry, these segmentation strategies are often embedded within broader narratives that frame consumer identities, aspirations, and cultural affiliations. Industry reports, produced by consulting firms, market research agencies, and fashion corporations, play a critical role in disseminating these narratives. They not only present empirical data but also construct interpretive frameworks that influence decision-making processes across the value chain (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

The narrative dimension of market segmentation is particularly significant in fashion due to the symbolic and cultural nature of clothing. Fashion products are not merely functional goods; they serve as markers of identity, status, and belonging (Crane, 2012). As a result, segmentation narratives often extend beyond statistical categorisations to include storytelling elements that depict consumer lifestyles, values, and aspirations. For instance, segments such as "conscious consumers," "digital natives," or "luxury minimalists" are not only analytical categories but also narrative constructs that guide brand positioning and communication strategies (Euromonitor International, 2022).

In contemporary fashion industry reports, segmentation narratives are increasingly shaped by technological advancements and data analytics. The proliferation of big data, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms has enabled firms to develop more granular and dynamic segmentation models (Davenport et al., 2020). These developments have transformed the nature of segmentation narratives, making them more data-driven while simultaneously enhancing their persuasive and strategic functions. Reports now frequently integrate quantitative insights with qualitative storytelling, creating hybrid narratives that appeal to both analytical and interpretive audiences.

Moreover, the rise of sustainability and ethical consumption has introduced new dimensions to segmentation narratives. Consumers are increasingly segmented based on their environmental consciousness, ethical values, and social responsibility (Joy et al., 2012). Industry reports often emphasise these segments to align with broader societal trends and regulatory pressures. In doing so, they contribute to the construction of normative narratives that define what constitutes responsible consumption in the fashion context.

Despite the growing importance of segmentation narratives, there remains a relative lack of scholarly attention to how these narratives are constructed, communicated, and interpreted within industry reports. Existing research has largely focused on segmentation techniques and their effectiveness, rather than on the narrative structures that underpin them (Dolnicar et al., 2018). This gap is particularly notable given the increasing role of narratives in shaping organisational strategies and stakeholder perceptions.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the narratives of market segmentation in fashion industry reports. It seeks to explore how segmentation categories are constructed, what assumptions underlie these constructions, and how they influence strategic decision-making. By adopting a qualitative research approach based on secondary data, the study analyses a range of industry reports to identify recurring themes, patterns, and discursive strategies.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both marketing theory and fashion studies. From a theoretical perspective, it extends the understanding of market segmentation by incorporating narrative analysis, thereby bridging the gap between quantitative modelling and qualitative interpretation. From a practical standpoint, it provides insights for industry practitioners on how segmentation narratives can be more effectively designed and communicated.

In conclusion, as the fashion industry continues to evolve in response to technological, cultural, and environmental changes, the role of market segmentation narratives becomes increasingly critical. By examining these narratives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how markets are conceptualised and communicated in contemporary fashion industry reports.

2. Literature Review

Market segmentation has long been recognised as a cornerstone of marketing strategy. The concept was first formally introduced by Smith (1956), who defined it as a strategy for dividing a market into distinct groups of consumers with similar needs and characteristics. Subsequent scholars have expanded this definition, emphasising the role of segmentation in enhancing marketing efficiency and effectiveness (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Wedel & Kamakura, 2012).

Traditional segmentation approaches are typically categorised into four main types: demographic, geographic, psychographic, and behavioural segmentation. Demographic segmentation focuses on variables such as age, gender, income, and education, while geographic segmentation considers spatial factors such as location and climate. Psychographic segmentation, on the other hand, examines consumers' lifestyles, values, and personalities, and behavioural segmentation analyses patterns of consumption, usage, and brand loyalty (Solomon, 2020).

In the context of the fashion industry, psychographic and behavioural segmentation have gained particular prominence. This is because fashion consumption is closely linked to identity formation and self-expression, making it necessary to understand consumers beyond basic demographic characteristics (Crane, 2012). As a result, segmentation strategies in fashion often incorporate complex and multidimensional variables that capture the symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption.

2.1 Evolution of Segmentation in the Digital Era

The advent of digital technologies has significantly transformed segmentation practices. The availability of large-scale consumer data and advanced analytics tools has enabled firms to develop more precise and dynamic segmentation models (Davenport et al., 2020). Techniques such as cluster analysis, machine learning, and predictive modelling are now commonly used to identify and target specific consumer segments.

Digital platforms have also facilitated the emergence of micro-segmentation and real-time personalisation. Unlike traditional segmentation, which relies on relatively stable categories, micro-segmentation involves the continuous refinement of segments based on real-time data (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). This has important implications for segmentation narratives, as it requires the constant updating and reinterpretation of consumer profiles.

In fashion industry reports, these technological developments are often presented as part of broader narratives about innovation and competitiveness. Reports frequently highlight the use of data analytics as a key driver of market understanding and strategic advantage (McKinsey & Company, 2023). However, there is also a growing recognition of the challenges associated with data-driven segmentation, including issues related to privacy, data quality, and algorithmic bias (Erevelles et al., 2016).

2.2 Narratives in Marketing and Consumer Research

The concept of narrative has gained increasing attention in marketing and consumer research. Narratives are understood as structured accounts that organise information and provide meaning to experiences (Escalas, 2004). In the context of marketing, narratives play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions, brand identities, and market representations.

Several scholars have emphasised the importance of storytelling in branding and communication. For example, Holt (2004) argues that brands function as cultural icons by embedding themselves in compelling narratives that resonate with consumers' identities and aspirations. Similarly, Thompson (2004) highlights the role of narratives in constructing consumer identities and social meanings.

In relation to market segmentation, narratives serve to humanise and contextualise abstract categories. Instead of presenting segments as mere statistical groupings, narratives depict them as coherent and relatable entities with distinct characteristics and motivations. This narrative approach enhances the communicative power of segmentation and facilitates its integration into strategic decision-making processes.

2.3 Segmentation Narratives in Fashion Industry Reports

Fashion industry reports represent a unique genre of communication that combines empirical analysis with narrative storytelling. These reports are typically produced by consulting firms, market research agencies, and industry organisations, and they serve as key sources of information for stakeholders such as brands, investors, and policymakers.

Segmentation narratives in these reports often take the form of archetypal consumer profiles. For instance, segments such as "Gen Z trendsetters," "sustainable shoppers," and "value-driven consumers" are commonly used to describe different market groups (Euromonitor International, 2022). These profiles are often accompanied by descriptive narratives that outline the characteristics, preferences, and behaviours of each segment.

Such narratives are not neutral representations; they are shaped by specific assumptions, frameworks, and objectives. For example, the emphasis on sustainability in segmentation narratives reflects broader societal and regulatory trends, as well as the strategic priorities of industry actors (Joy et al., 2012). Similarly, the focus on digital engagement and omnichannel behaviour reflects the increasing importance of technology in the fashion industry.

Recent studies have begun to explore the discursive aspects of industry reports. Arvidsson (2006) suggests that marketing communications play a key role in constructing consumer identities and social realities. In a similar vein, Zwick et al. (2008) argue that market segmentation contributes to the production of consumer subjectivities by defining and categorising individuals in specific ways.

2.4 Critical Perspectives on Market Segmentation

While market segmentation is widely regarded as a valuable strategic tool, it has also been subject to critical scrutiny. Some scholars argue that segmentation can reinforce stereotypes and oversimplify complex consumer behaviours (Dolnicar et al., 2018). Others highlight the ethical implications of segmentation, particularly in relation to data privacy and consumer manipulation (Erevelles et al., 2016).

In the context of narrative analysis, segmentation can be seen as a form of discursive practice that shapes how markets and consumers are understood. From this perspective, segmentation narratives are not merely descriptive but also performative, as they influence how individuals perceive themselves and their consumption choices (Thompson, 2004).

In the fashion industry, these issues are particularly salient due to the role of fashion in shaping social identities and cultural norms. Segmentation narratives that emphasise certain lifestyles or values can contribute to the construction of aspirational ideals, which may have both positive and negative implications for consumers.

2.5 Research Gap and Contribution

Despite the extensive literature on market segmentation and marketing narratives, there is a limited understanding of how segmentation narratives are constructed and communicated in fashion industry reports. Most existing studies focus on either the technical aspects of segmentation or the role of narratives in branding, without integrating these perspectives.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the intersection of segmentation and narrative in the context of fashion industry reports. By adopting a qualitative approach based on secondary data, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how segmentation narratives are developed and how they influence strategic decision-making.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates market segmentation theory, narrative theory, and discursive constructionism to examine how segmentation narratives are constructed and communicated in fashion industry reports. This integrative approach enables a comprehensive understanding of segmentation not only as a technical marketing practice but also as a socio-cultural and communicative phenomenon.

3.1 Market Segmentation Theory

Market segmentation theory provides the foundational basis for this study. Originating from the seminal work of Smith (1956), segmentation is conceptualised as the process of dividing a heterogeneous market into homogeneous subgroups to facilitate targeted marketing strategies. Subsequent developments have expanded the theoretical scope of segmentation, incorporating advanced statistical techniques and multidimensional consumer profiling (Wedel & Kamakura, 2012).

Within this framework, segmentation is traditionally viewed as a rational and data-driven process aimed at optimising resource allocation and enhancing market efficiency (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, this study adopts a critical perspective by recognising that segmentation categories are not purely objective constructs. Instead, they are shaped by interpretive decisions, institutional contexts, and communicative objectives. As such, segmentation is understood as both an analytical and representational practice.

In the fashion industry, segmentation theory is particularly relevant due to the diversity and fluidity of consumer identities. The industry's reliance on symbolic consumption necessitates segmentation models that capture not only functional needs but also emotional and cultural dimensions (Crane, 2012). This complexity underscores the importance of examining how segmentation categories are constructed and presented in industry narratives.

3.2 Narrative Theory

Narrative theory offers a critical lens for understanding how segmentation categories are transformed into meaningful and persuasive narratives. Narratives are defined as structured accounts that organise events, characters, and contexts into coherent and interpretable stories (Escalas, 2004). In marketing, narratives play a central role in shaping consumer perceptions and brand identities.

From a narrative perspective, segmentation is not merely about categorising consumers but about telling stories about them. These stories often include elements such as motivations, aspirations, and lifestyles, which serve to humanise abstract data and make it more relatable to stakeholders. For example, a segment labelled as "eco-conscious consumers" is typically accompanied by a narrative that emphasises environmental awareness, ethical consumption, and lifestyle choices.

Holt's (2004) theory of cultural branding further highlights the importance of narratives in constructing market meanings. According to Holt, brands achieve cultural significance by embedding themselves in narratives that resonate with broader societal values and ideologies. Similarly, segmentation narratives in industry reports often reflect and reinforce cultural discourses, such as sustainability, digitalisation, and inclusivity.

Moreover, narrative theory emphasises the role of storytelling in knowledge construction. Industry reports do not simply present data; they interpret and contextualise it through narratives that guide readers' understanding. This interpretive function is particularly important in complex and rapidly changing industries like fashion, where stakeholders rely on narratives to make sense of market trends and uncertainties.

3.3 Discursive Constructionism

To further deepen the analysis, this study draws on discursive constructionism, which views social realities as constructed through language and discourse (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). From this perspective, market segmentation is seen as a discursive practice that shapes how consumers and markets are understood and represented.

Discursive constructionism challenges the assumption that segmentation categories are neutral or objective. Instead, it posits that these categories are produced through specific discursive processes that reflect power relations, institutional norms, and strategic interests (Zwick et al., 2008). For instance, the identification of certain consumer segments as "high-value" or "aspirational" reflects not only market data but also organisational priorities and value judgments.

In the context of fashion industry reports, discursive constructionism enables the analysis of how segmentation narratives are constructed through language, imagery, and framing. It highlights the role of discourse in shaping consumer identities and influencing strategic decision-making. For example, the repeated emphasis on "Gen Z consumers" in industry reports contributes to the construction of this group as a distinct and influential market segment, thereby shaping how brands engage with it.

Furthermore, this perspective aligns with Thompson's (2004) view of consumer culture as a site of meaning-making, where market representations influence individual and collective identities. Segmentation narratives, therefore, are not merely descriptive but also performative, as they contribute to the creation and reinforcement of consumer subjectivities.

3.4 Integrative Framework

By integrating these three theoretical perspectives, the study conceptualises market segmentation narratives as hybrid constructs that combine analytical rigour with narrative meaning and discursive power. Market segmentation theory provides the structural basis for identifying consumer groups, narrative theory explains how these groups are transformed into compelling stories, and discursive constructionism reveals the underlying processes and implications of these constructions.

This integrative framework allows for a multidimensional analysis of fashion industry reports, focusing on both the content and the form of segmentation narratives. It enables the identification of key themes, narrative structures, and discursive strategies, as well as their implications for marketing practice and consumer culture.

In summary, the theoretical framework of this study positions market segmentation as a dynamic and multifaceted practice that extends beyond technical analysis to encompass narrative and discursive dimensions. This perspective provides a robust foundation for examining how segmentation narratives are constructed and communicated in the fashion industry.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the construction and communication of market segmentation narratives in fashion industry reports. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of meanings, interpretations, and discursive practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the study's focus on narratives and discourse, a qualitative approach enables the analysis of both explicit and implicit elements within industry reports.

The research is based on secondary data analysis, utilising publicly available fashion industry reports produced by leading consulting firms, market research agencies, and industry organisations. Secondary data analysis is appropriate for this study because it provides access to a wide range of professionally produced materials that reflect current industry practices and perspectives (Johnston, 2017).

4.1 Data Sources and Sampling

The data for this study consist of a purposive sample of fashion industry reports published between 2020 and 2024. These reports were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and influence within the industry. Key sources include reports from organisations such as McKinsey & Company, Euromonitor International, and other prominent market research firms.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the selected reports contain substantial content related to market segmentation and consumer analysis. This sampling strategy allows for the inclusion of information-rich cases that are particularly relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015).

The selected reports encompass a variety of topics, including global fashion trends, consumer behaviour, digital transformation, and sustainability. This diversity enables a comprehensive analysis of segmentation narratives across different contexts and themes.

4.2 Data Collection

Data collection involved the systematic retrieval and organisation of relevant industry reports from official websites and databases. Each report was reviewed to identify sections related to market segmentation, consumer profiling, and trend analysis.

The collected data were then compiled into a structured dataset, with key excerpts and segments extracted for further analysis. These excerpts include textual descriptions, visual representations, and categorisations of consumer segments. The focus was on identifying how segmentation categories are described, contextualised, and narrated within the reports.

4.3 Data Analysis

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary method of data analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis followed a six-phase process:

- **Familiarisation with the data**: The researcher conducted an initial reading of the reports to gain an overall understanding of the content.
- **Generating initial codes**: Relevant segments of text were coded based on their thematic content, such as consumer characteristics, values, and behaviours.
- **Searching for themes**: Codes were grouped into broader themes that represent recurring patterns in segmentation narratives.
- **Reviewing themes**: The identified themes were refined and validated to ensure coherence and relevance.
- **Defining and naming themes**: Each theme was clearly defined and labelled to capture its essence.
- **Producing the report**: The findings were organised and presented in a structured and coherent manner.

In addition to thematic analysis, the study incorporates elements of discourse analysis to examine the language and framing of segmentation narratives. This involves analysing how specific terms, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies are used to construct and communicate consumer segments (Fairclough, 2013).

4.4 Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the research, several strategies were employed. First, data triangulation was achieved by analysing multiple industry reports from different sources, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings (Patton, 2015).

Second, transparent documentation of the research process was maintained, including detailed records of data collection, coding, and analysis. This enhances the dependability and replicability of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Third, reflexivity was incorporated into the research process, with the researcher critically reflecting on their own assumptions and potential biases. This is particularly important in qualitative research, where interpretation plays a central role.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data and therefore does not involve human subjects or require ethical approval. However, ethical considerations were still taken into account, particularly in relation to the accurate representation and citation of sources.

All data sources were properly cited in accordance with APA (7th edition) guidelines, and care was taken to avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the original content. Additionally, the study acknowledges the limitations of secondary data, including potential biases in the original reports (Mannan & Farhana, 2026).

4.6 Limitations of the Methodology

While the qualitative and secondary data approach offers several advantages, it also has limitations. One limitation is the reliance on industry-produced reports, which may reflect specific organisational perspectives and biases. These reports are often designed to promote particular narratives or strategic agendas, which may influence the representation of market segments.

Another limitation is the lack of primary data, which restricts the ability to validate the findings through direct engagement with consumers or industry practitioners. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating interviews or surveys to complement the analysis of industry reports.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology provides a robust and appropriate approach for exploring the research questions. It allows for a rich and nuanced analysis of segmentation narratives, contributing to a deeper understanding of their role in the fashion industry.

5. Findings and Analysis

The analysis of selected fashion industry reports reveals that market segmentation is not merely presented as a technical classification system but is deeply embedded within narrative structures that construct, legitimise, and operationalise consumer identities. Through thematic and discourse analysis, five dominant patterns emerge: narrative personalisation of segments, moralization of consumption categories, technologization of segmentation, temporal framing of consumer groups, and strategic abstraction and simplification.

5.1 Narrative Personalisation of Market Segments

One of the most prominent findings is the consistent transformation of statistical segments into personalised consumer archetypes. Rather than presenting segmentation in purely numerical or categorical terms, industry reports frequently depict segments as quasi-individuals with distinct lifestyles, motivations, and aspirations. For instance, labels such as “digital-native trendsetters” or “value-conscious minimalists” are accompanied by rich descriptive narratives that humanise these categories.

This personalisation serves multiple purposes. First, it enhances the interpretability of segmentation data by making it more accessible to diverse stakeholders, including executives, marketers, and investors. Second, it facilitates strategic alignment, as decision-makers can more easily relate to and envision target consumers (Escalas, 2004). Third, it contributes to the construction of consumer identities, as these narratives often circulate beyond internal reports into marketing communications and media discourse.

However, this process also involves a degree of selective representation. By emphasising certain traits while omitting others, segmentation narratives create simplified and coherent identities that may not fully capture the complexity of real consumers. This aligns with the critique that segmentation often involves the reduction of multidimensional behaviours into manageable categories (Dolnicar et al., 2018).

5.2 Moralization of Consumption Categories

A second key finding is the increasing moralization of segmentation narratives, particularly in relation to sustainability and ethical consumption. Industry reports frequently categorise consumers based on their environmental awareness, ethical values, and social responsibility, using terms such as "conscious consumers," "ethical shoppers," and "sustainability advocates."

These categories are not neutral descriptors; they carry normative connotations that position certain forms of consumption as more desirable or legitimate than others. For example, "conscious consumers" are often portrayed as informed, responsible, and forward-thinking, while less sustainable segments are implicitly framed as outdated or less aware (Joy et al., 2012).

This moralization reflects broader societal and institutional pressures, including regulatory frameworks, activist movements, and shifting cultural values. It also serves strategic purposes, as brands seek to align themselves with positive social narratives and enhance their legitimacy (Holt, 2004).

At the same time, the moralization of segmentation raises critical questions about inclusivity and accessibility. Not all consumers have the resources or opportunities to engage in ethical consumption, and the framing of sustainability as a moral imperative may inadvertently marginalise certain groups. Thus, segmentation narratives not only describe markets but also participate in the construction of ethical hierarchies within consumption.

5.3 Technologization of Segmentation Narratives

The analysis further reveals a strong emphasis on technology-driven segmentation, particularly in relation to data analytics, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms. Industry reports frequently highlight the use of advanced analytical tools to identify and target consumer segments, framing these technologies as essential for competitiveness and innovation (Davenport et al., 2020).

This technologization is reflected in the language and structure of segmentation narratives. Terms such as "data-driven insights," "predictive modelling," and "real-time personalisation" are commonly used to describe segmentation processes. These narratives often emphasise precision, efficiency, and scalability, positioning technology as a key enabler of market understanding.

However, this emphasis also contributes to the reification of data, where complex human behaviours are treated as quantifiable and predictable variables. While data-driven approaches offer valuable insights, they may overlook the contextual and experiential aspects of consumption that are difficult to capture through quantitative metrics (Erevelles et al., 2016).

Moreover, the technologization of segmentation narratives can obscure underlying power dynamics, including issues related to data ownership, surveillance, and algorithmic bias. By presenting technology as neutral and objective, these narratives may downplay the ethical and social implications of data-driven marketing practices.

5.4 Temporal Framing of Consumer Segments

Another significant pattern is the use of temporal framing in segmentation narratives. Industry reports often situate consumer segments within broader temporal contexts, such as generational cohorts (e.g., Gen Z, Millennials) or emerging trends (e.g., post-pandemic consumers).

This temporal framing serves to position segments as part of a dynamic and evolving market landscape, emphasising change, innovation, and future orientation. For example, Gen Z is frequently portrayed as a transformative force in the fashion industry, characterised by digital fluency, social consciousness, and demand for authenticity.

Such narratives are effective in highlighting emerging opportunities and risks, enabling organisations to anticipate and respond to market shifts. However, they also involve a degree of generalisation and stereotyping, as entire generations are often characterised by a set of assumed traits (Solomon, 2020).

Furthermore, temporal narratives contribute to the construction of market urgency, encouraging brands to adapt quickly to changing consumer preferences. This sense of urgency can drive innovation but may also lead to reactive and short-term strategies.

5.5 Strategic Abstraction and Simplification

Finally, the analysis reveals a tendency toward strategic abstraction and simplification in segmentation narratives. While reports often begin with detailed data analysis, the final presentation of segments is typically streamlined into a limited number of categories, each with clear and distinct characteristics.

This simplification is necessary for decision-making and communication, as overly complex segmentation models can be difficult to operationalise. However, it also involves the loss of nuance and variability, as diverse consumer behaviours are aggregated into broad categories.

From a discursive perspective, this process can be understood as a form of knowledge production, where complex realities are translated into manageable representations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). These representations are not merely descriptive but also prescriptive, as they guide strategic actions and shape organisational priorities.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that segmentation narratives in fashion industry reports are multifaceted constructs that combine analytical, narrative, and discursive elements. They play a crucial role in shaping how markets are understood, communicated, and acted upon, while also reflecting broader cultural and technological dynamics.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of market segmentation as a hybrid practice that integrates analytical rigour with narrative meaning and discursive power. By examining segmentation narratives in fashion industry reports, the study highlights the complex interplay between data, storytelling, and social construction.

6.1 Reframing Market Segmentation as Narrative Practice

One of the key contributions of this study is the reconceptualisation of market segmentation as a narrative practice. Traditional marketing literature tends to emphasise the technical and quantitative aspects of segmentation, focusing on methods, variables, and outcomes (Wedel & Kamakura, 2012). However, the findings suggest that segmentation is equally a process of meaning-making, where data is interpreted and communicated through narratives.

This perspective aligns with Escalas' (2004) notion of narrative processing, which emphasises the role of storytelling in shaping understanding and engagement. In the context of fashion industry reports, narratives serve to bridge the gap between complex data and strategic decision-making, enabling stakeholders to make sense of market dynamics.

Moreover, the narrative dimension of segmentation enhances its persuasive power. By presenting segments as relatable and coherent entities, narratives facilitate the alignment of organisational strategies with perceived consumer needs and aspirations. This underscores the importance of considering not only what segmentation reveals but also how it is communicated.

6.2 The Role of Discourse in Constructing Consumer Identities

The study also highlights the role of segmentation narratives in the construction of consumer identities. Drawing on discursive constructionism, it becomes evident that segmentation is not merely a descriptive tool but a performative practice that shapes how consumers are perceived and how they perceive themselves (Zwick et al., 2008).

For example, the repeated use of categories such as "conscious consumers" or "digital natives" contributes to the normalisation of these identities, influencing both marketing strategies and consumer self-conceptions. This aligns with Thompson's (2004) view of consumer culture as a site of identity construction, where market representations play a central role.

However, this process also raises critical concerns about representation and power. Segmentation narratives often reflect the perspectives and priorities of dominant industry actors, potentially marginalising alternative viewpoints and experiences. This highlights the need for more inclusive and reflexive approaches to segmentation.

6.3 Ethical Implications of Segmentation Narratives

The moralization and technologization of segmentation narratives have significant ethical implications. The framing of certain consumption practices as morally superior can create normative pressures that influence consumer behaviour and social expectations (Joy et al., 2012). While this can promote positive outcomes, such as increased sustainability, it may also lead to exclusion and inequality.

Similarly, the reliance on data-driven segmentation raises concerns about privacy, surveillance, and algorithmic bias (Erevelles et al., 2016). The portrayal of technology as a neutral and objective tool may obscure these issues, limiting critical engagement with the ethical dimensions of segmentation.

These findings suggest the need for a more ethical and transparent approach to segmentation, one that acknowledges its limitations and potential impacts. This includes greater attention to data ethics, inclusivity, and the responsible use of narratives in marketing communication.

6.4 Implications for Fashion Industry Practice

From a practical perspective, the study offers several implications for fashion industry practitioners. First, it highlights the importance of integrating analytical and narrative approaches to segmentation. While data-driven insights are essential, their effectiveness depends on how they are communicated and interpreted.

Second, the findings emphasise the need for nuanced and flexible segmentation models that capture the complexity of contemporary consumers. This involves moving beyond static categories and embracing more dynamic and multidimensional approaches.

Third, practitioners should be mindful of the ethical and social implications of segmentation narratives. This includes avoiding stereotypes, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring that narratives do not reinforce harmful norms or inequalities.

Finally, the study underscores the value of critical reflection in segmentation practices. By recognising segmentation as a discursive and interpretive process, practitioners can develop more thoughtful and responsible strategies.

6.5 Theoretical Contributions and Future Research

The study contributes to the literature by integrating market segmentation theory with narrative theory and discursive constructionism. This interdisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of segmentation as a complex and multifaceted practice.

It also opens up new avenues for research, particularly in relation to the discursive and cultural dimensions of marketing. Future studies could explore how segmentation narratives are received and interpreted by consumers, or how they vary across different cultural and geographical contexts.

Additionally, there is potential for further research on the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, on segmentation narratives and consumer engagement.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights the importance of viewing market segmentation as more than a technical tool. It is a powerful narrative and discursive practice that shapes how markets are understood and acted upon. By examining segmentation narratives in fashion industry reports, this study provides valuable insights into the evolving nature of marketing in a complex and dynamic environment.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored the evolving role of market segmentation narratives in fashion industry reports, emphasising that segmentation extends beyond a purely analytical function to become a central mechanism of meaning-making and strategic communication. By integrating market segmentation theory, narrative theory, and discursive constructionism, the research has demonstrated that segmentation operates simultaneously as a technical, interpretive, and performative practice.

The findings reveal that segmentation narratives are constructed through a combination of personalisation, moral framing, technological discourse, and temporal positioning. These narratives transform abstract data into coherent and relatable consumer archetypes, enabling stakeholders to better understand and engage with complex market dynamics. However, this process also involves simplification and selective representation, which may obscure the diversity and fluidity of consumer identities.

A key contribution of this study lies in highlighting the discursive power of segmentation. By defining and categorising consumers, segmentation narratives actively shape how individuals are perceived within the marketplace and how they perceive themselves. This performative dimension underscores the importance of critically examining the assumptions and implications embedded in segmentation practices. In particular, the moralization of consumption and the technologization of segmentation raise important ethical considerations related to inclusivity, accessibility, and data governance.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that fashion industry practitioners should adopt a more reflexive and responsible approach to segmentation. This includes recognising the narrative nature of segmentation, avoiding reductive stereotypes, and ensuring that segmentation strategies are inclusive and ethically grounded. Furthermore, the integration of qualitative insights with quantitative data can enhance the depth and relevance of segmentation narratives.

In conclusion, market segmentation narratives play a pivotal role in shaping contemporary fashion markets. As the industry continues to evolve in response to technological innovation and socio-cultural change, the ability to construct meaningful, transparent, and ethical segmentation narratives will become increasingly critical. Future research should further investigate the reception of these narratives among consumers and explore their variations across different cultural and geographical contexts.

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