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We współczesnym świecie, który ulega usieciowieniu coraz silniej przenosimy relacje w sferę wirtualną. Tendencja ta była widoczna od lat, jednak została znacznie spotęgowana przez pandemię Covid-19, w trakcie której media społecznościowe i internetowe komunikatory stały się podstawową formą kontaktu, również w sferze zawodowej.

Wraz ze zmieniającym się światem zmienia się dzisiejszy odbiorca, który przestaje być biernym konsumentem, stając się bardziej aktywnym i świadomym prosumentem. Zwraca ogromną uwagę na wiarygodność projektanta mody i wartości jakie reprezentuje jego marka oraz na jakość produktów i etyczny aspekt mody. Jest coraz czujniejszym użytkownikiem Sieci, sprawdzającym i porównującym rynek.

Social media i moda wzajemnie intensywnie na siebie oddziałują. Rola mediów społecznościowych w procesie projektowania mody nie powinna ograniczać się jedynie do zbierania inspiracji twórczej - złożone narzędzia i funkcje serwisów internetowych pozwalają projektantom na prowadzenie badań i analiz oraz pozyskiwanie informacji o strukturze i potrzebach grupy odbiorczej. Dostarczają również wiedzy o opiniach i postawach klientów wobec marki. Dlatego też stanowią idealne narzędzie do nawiązania kontaktu z odbiorcami w celu tworzenia projektów lepiej dostosowanych do wymagań grupy odbiorczej oraz nawiązania z nią relacji.

Znakiem naszych czasów, zwłaszcza w trakcie kryzysu roku 2020 i początku 2021 spowodowanego pandemią koronawirusa, jest narastający brak zaufania do narzucanych norm, w tym do dyktatury trendów i wzorców w modzie. Za cel pracy postawiłam sobie zadanie wsluchania się w odbiorcę i umożliwienie mu (kontrolowanego) wpływania na produkt, który jest dla niego projektowany. W mojej pracy udowadniam, że istnieje alternatywny model projektowania ubioru - zgodnie z ideą "dzieła otwartego" opisywaną przez Umberto Eco - dający szansę współczesnemu odbiorcy i twórcy na nawiązanie współpracy, w efekcie której powstaje forma stworzona w oparciu o wzajemne oddziaływanie na linii twórca-odbiorca-dzieło. Uważam, że kwestia świadomego "otwierania" dzieła jeszcze nigdy nie była tak potrzebna, zwłaszcza w branży mody. Media społecznościowe

i technologia jaką dysponujemy na co dzień stanowią do tego idealne narzędzie, które z powodzeniem może być stosowane w procesie projektowania ubioru.

Etap komunikacji z odbiorcą za pośrednictwem mediów społecznościowych, w celu zaproszenia go do ingerencji i współtworzenia założeń projektowych kolekcji (wedle jego preferencji i potrzeb) był dla mnie zdecydowanie najważniejszy. Partycypacja odbiorcy stanowiła element dotąd brakujący w standardowo przyjętych relacjach między projektantami ubioru a potencjalnymi klientami, w których to designer mody pełnił funkcję znacznie bardziej dyktatorską (narzucając trendy), niż otwartą na współpracę. W pracy nad kolekcją doktorską proces współpracy z odbiorcą i jego mobilizacja była dla mnie równie istotna co finalny kształt samego dzieła - będącego z jednej strony efektem tej współpracy, wizualizacją badań (czyli relacji z grupą), lecz z drugiej - rezultatem przede wszystkim mojej pracy i moich indywidualnych rozwiązań projektowych.

Testowany przeze mnie w trakcie pracy typ relacji między twórcą a odbiorcą jest wynikiem potrzeb zmieniającego się świata, sposobem w jakim sztuka, moda i proces jej projektowania musi przystosować się do obecnych czasów. Daje on szansę na budowanie nowego rodzaju stosunków projektanta-artysty i klienta-publiczności, nowej zależności między kontemplacją a korzystaniem z dzieła jakim jest kolekcja ubioru.

Z pewnością model projektowania ubioru oparty na komunikacji z odbiorcą za pośrednictwem mediów społecznościowych zostanie ze mną na stałe. Prowadzone podczas pracy badania i idące za nimi nowe doświadczenia projektowe silnie wpłynęły na mnie jako na twórcę, zmuszając niejednokrotnie do zmiany myślenia o dziele artystycznym i dotychczasowych przyzwyczajeniach twórczych. Moim celem po zakończeniu pracy staje się więc kontynuacja testowania nowego systemu prowadzenia procesu projektowania, w wymiarze długofalowym oraz miejmy nadzieję - w rzeczywistości ponownie wolnej od pandemii.

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Źródło: opracowanie własne

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Źródło: opracowanie własne

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Źródło: opracowanie własne

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Źródło: opracowanie własne

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ENGLISH
VERSION



The role of social media in the process of clothes design.

Clothing collection.

Klaudia Markiewicz

Work supervisor
Professor Barbara Hanuszkiewicz

The Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź

Łódź, 2021





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The role of social media in the process of clothes design.

Clothing collection.

Motivations for choosing the subject:

Fashion is one of the most important and influential branches of culture and art. Its development, new trends and changes are observed by a large part of society. Although young people are most affected by trends and influences, in a recent nationwide survey conducted by Allegro as many as 68% of Poles reported that they are interested in fashion. We increasingly perceive it as pleasure rather than just a necessity of life dictated by the need to be clothed.

With the growing popularity of social media, access to fashion information and insight into the latest trends has become much easier and less elitist than before. The last 5-7 years have seen a real revolution in the media. The social media that emerged after 2005 (blogs, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, Tumblr, etc.) have consistently matched the reach of industrial media (television, radio, magazines, books, journals) and are now the fastest growing form of mass media, while also being utilized for public relations. Social networking communities are instrumental in building present-day trends and role models. The ease of communication between users (including also between the brand and the recipient) as well as the sense of relationship and belonging have become central. This network interaction scheme has become an ideal tool for exerting influence in a much simpler and more direct manner than is the case with non-Internet-based mass media. Currently, social media shape and form opinions and attitudes, while also defining what is “normal” and acceptable, and we, as active users, follow the presented model of life.

Nowadays, online media have taken over the functions of the industry – they offer much greater efficiency and a multitude of possibilities as a marketing tool, including for artists. Everything that is published has an impact, and how we shape our brand image determines whether we allow ourselves to be noticed – both by business partners and customers. No one can stop the changes taking place in the media system. New media, especially social media, are no longer an alternative or niche serving only entertainment purposes – they are becoming the main direction of development for all media and an influencing most industries. The old model of media functioning will not return. Surveys conducted by CBOS (*Polish Centre for Public Opinion Research*) show that trust in the mass media (press, radio and television) is declining year by year, and the Internet is becoming the most important medium for a large part of society, especially for the younger generation. In Poland, over 60% of 18-24 year olds and 47% of 25-34 year olds say that the Internet is the most reliable source of information on national and international events.¹

We are currently experiencing a period of social networking and media personalization, which allows for their use in ways never before possible – in the private, professional and artistic spheres. As Professor Gogołek aptly describes: “almost two decades of media presence in the virtual world crystallized another important feature of this form of information distribution – interactivity, replacing linearity, i.e. transferring information not only in one direction, but holding a dialogue between a computer (the WWW website) and the person using it. There is a Web globalization effect, which was triggered at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries by a previously unforeseeable chain reaction process of expansion of the possibilities offered by the Internet. The consolidation of the media in a virtual world embodies McLuhan’s prediction that the media’s enrichment with the potential of information technology will unleash powerful forces similar to those produced in nuclear fission or fusion.”²

¹ Research Communication on *Wiarygodność mediów*, ISSN 2353-5822 No. 70/2019, Research Center Public Opinion Centre. www.CBOS.pl.

I believe that in the context of such a fast and dynamically changing world, social media will dominate all other media, becoming the main mode of communication. For more than a few years now, interpersonal contacts have been evolving. Personal relations are weakening in favour of communication on the Internet. This also applies to customer-brand (fashion) relationships. According to the research, consumers are moving away from traditional shopping to the Internet. As these changes are progressing rapidly and affecting the fashion industry, a fashion designer should use every skill and opportunity to utilize all his skills and potentialities to stay up-to-date, or preferably learn to predict them. To this end, social media can prove to be an indispensable tool.

In the six years since I started my own brand I have designed up until now a total of 10 collections, which I have presented in thirteen countries, on three continents. With practically no financial input of my own, using only the possibilities offered by social media. At that time I noticed how important Internet media are for a young fashion designer, how much the image we create on the Internet impacts our career development. However, as a designer I see even more potential in social media which I can use in my work now and in the future. I believe that social media allow me to understand my clients better and – more importantly – to get in direct contact with them (without territorial limitations), as well as allowing the consultation of ideas and split-second feedback. This seems to be an ideal point for a combination of the two fields in which I have the most professional experience. In my PhD dissertation, I would like to explore this topic by creating an experimental collection of clothes in collaboration with my target group, using social media as the main tool for clothing design.

In the classic fashion design scheme of creating a collection a year in advance, it is already very difficult to define customer preferences precisely, when the customer him/herself is overwhelmed by stimuli and his/her tastes are constantly changing

2 W. Gogolek, *Komunikacja sieciowa. Uwarunkowania, kategorie, paradoksy*, Warsaw 2010, p. 160-190 (<http://gogolek.pl/>).

under the influence of waves of micro-trends. This is particularly difficult in the context of changing market needs as a function of the current situation in the world.

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has brought normal life to a halt in most countries around the world. As governments and health systems implement strict travel restrictions and distancing measures to slow the rate of infection and minimize fatalities, we are witnessing a period of significant consumer uncertainty. Looking at market forecasts, even a mitigation of the Covid-19 pandemic does not offer much chance of a rapid return to normal everyday life. In the context of the current situation and growing expenditure unrelated to entertainment and typical consumption, a large part of society will reconsider its values and purchasing decisions. All of this will happen in tandem with the acceleration of digitization, as a result of lockdowns and reduction of face-to-face interactions. Consumer expectations are being transformed by an uncertain public mood. In a more challenging global environment, consumers will look to providers for transparency and credibility. Reports from Worth Global Style Network (the world's largest trend forecasting platform) show that the biggest challenge for fashion companies and designers will be to go digital in order to show authenticity and create products with value, quality and longevity as the essence of luxury at an affordable price. Today, technology and social media will enable both consumers and brands to make more in-depth market analyses and, consequently, smarter choices. Research shows that there is a growing interest among consumers in niche "slow-fashion" brands that incorporate transparency, ethics and sustainability into their DNA. This affects purchasing decisions – consumers are willing to pay a higher price for a product that has been designed with their needs in mind.

This only confirms the assumption that it is necessary to modify the usual patterns in the design process and open up to the recipient.³

Artistic objective

There is an emerging need for changes in product design in order to meet current customer expectations and requirements. Therefore, I would like to devote my PhD dissertation to researching and testing a new model of design, which may, in the future, replace the classic, well-known process of creating clothes. As a result, my goal is to deviate from the hitherto accepted dictatorial attitude of a fashion designer and create a collection of clothes in collaboration with my audience, using social media as the main tool in the clothing design process. The collection will follow the contemporary, ever-changing needs of customers – the designs will be a direct response to their preferences and needs arising on an ongoing basis. This type of design will be a completely new experience for me.

Methods and Action Plan

In my opinion, social media will become the primary tool for creating fashion collections. Predicting the final form and shape of the collection, without prior initial contact with the recipient is virtually impossible. Everything will have to be created “on the fly” based on preference research in the recipient group (which is clearly precisely defined by statistical data). The recipient group consists of my existing clients, who follow my brand profile, rather than casual users. The research will have the basic form of symmetrical surveys, with a two-stage forced-choice scale. Their research results will allow developing detailed assumptions of the collection on the basis of respondent preferences.

³ <https://www.wgsn.com/fashion/article/86569>.<https://www.wgsn.com/fashion/article/8>. accessed on 19.02.2021

The collection will be a visualization of the research (target group needs), supplemented with my own research activity and design decisions. The results of the surveys will give me a precise indication as to the direction to follow and points of concern which need to be addressed so as to ensure that the product meets customer expectations. The creation process itself will become almost as significant as the target artistic work – the collection. It will be a form of experiment and a test of how a new technological tool, in the form of social media, can influence the alternative model of fashion design.

My research will follow the following work plan:

1. Determine the subject of the work and research hypotheses
2. Specify research objectives
3. Collect the necessary information on the target group (statistical analysis)
4. Prepare survey questions
5. Conduct the survey
6. Analyse the results
7. Identify collection assumptions based on a summary of previous research
8. Analyse inspirations, create a moodboard, prepare silhouette sketches, collect materials, conduct material tests, develop fabric patterns
9. Create a collection of clothing visualizing the research, while giving proper consideration to artistic vision, original cuts, materials and technological solutions
10. Summarize, document and describe the collection
11. Present the collection

1. CRISIS FASHION

It would be premature to say consumerism, which has so far been the hallmark of our times, is on the decline under pressure from the current economic crisis. Undoubtedly, however, consumer habits and preferences are changing dramatically. Together with them, the system of values, moods and attitudes of society towards its surroundings is changing.

The year 2020 – the outbreak of a global pandemic and the resulting compulsory quarantine was the starting point of a sudden change in worldview. However, it is not the only reason – for several years, we have seen a palpable tension and a growing resistance to established trends in politics, culture, pop-culture, art and tradition. A response (whether conscious or unconscious) to these unstable moods came in the form of emerging fashion trends. In the last 15 years, a multitude of micro-trends would appear, replacing the previous trend where a small number of mainstream trends would dominate a season or even an entire decade. This provided the consumer with an opportunity or an illusion of choice, with its overwhelming multitude of stimuli and solutions. In fact, however, I believe this to be symptomatic of a certain disruption in the direction of fashion development, a lack of willingness to adapt to users who – on their part – failed to clearly specify their preferences.

The ever-growing consumerism has given rise to a number of contradictory phenomena and tendencies: on the one hand: unrestrained shopaholism, pursuit of novelty, and industrial overproduction (with unsold products ending up in the fire as evidenced by the infamous burning of clothes by well-known chain stores⁴); in stark contrast with these on the other hand: slow fashion, less is more, back to the roots,

4 One of the most famous cases in which the destruction of new, unsold clothes came to light was the case of the H&M brand in 2017 and 2018. It turned out that the top chain company in Denmark alone temporarily disposed of more than 400 tonnes of clothing, and the practice of burning goods is commissioned in most countries where it sells, including Poland. Source: <https://www.newsweek.pl:trendy:co-handm-robi-z-ubraniami-ktorych-nie-sprzedal-na-promocjach-pali-je-sprawa-budzi:nnlne31>

renewed appreciation of handicraft, preferring limited-edition, original, high-quality products. Although the former group of tendencies had the upper hand for a long time, in the last 5 years the latter has been going from strength to strength, offering a promising vision of the future directions in fashion development.

Umberto Eco's observations of recent years are very pertinent and thought-provoking: *“One of the causes of the crisis experienced by bourgeois society is that the average person is unable to defend themselves against a system of accepted forms, supplied to them from outside, which are not the result of their individual exploration of reality. Social diseases of this type, such as conformism or submission to the direction of others, the herd instinct and subjugation to the masses, are the fruit of a passive reception of standard thoughts and judgments identified with “good form” in morality as well as in politics, in diet as well as in fashion, in the sphere of aesthetic tastes and in the field of pedagogical principles. The various suggestions and stimuli which act on the subconscious, whether in politics or in advertising, lead to the passive adoption of “good forms”, the redundancy of which enables the average person to avoid all effort”*.⁵ These words, though written in 1962, could be used to describe in an astonishingly pertinent manner the condition of the world, which was present until not so long ago.

In today's uncertain times and the accompanying negative mood heightened by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we as a society do not want to be surrounded by artificiality, the oppressive media dictatorship or its aggressive marketing advertisements. We are irritated by influencers and celebrities, who so far have served as social role models and promoted the model of a rich, ideal life that we felt pressured to aspire to. What we want and need now is credibility and transparency. We want to have a say in the form of products that are made for us and that we use, we want to know how they are made, who is behind them. In this perspective, the “old” authoritarian design system seems to be completely outdated. The fashion designer as a trend director, creating alone according to his own vision, wishing to impose his/her

5 U. Eco, *Dzieło otwarte. Forma i nieokreśloność w poetykach współczesnych*, Wydawnictwo Warszawa 2008, p. 185.

vision on passive customers is becoming an outdated model in the context of today's times.

At a time when previously known solutions are in crisis, there is undoubtedly a growing need to adjust the design arts and the model of creative process to the reality, and in the perspective of hindered direct interpersonal contacts, social media seem to be the only tool allowing this. Thanks to them, the chance for cooperation between the creator and the recipient becomes real (thanks to the mediation of an immediate interaction), which may result in a more accurate product, better suited to the contemporary user's needs. Indeed, while on the one hand social media contribute to the "overstimulation" of society, on the other, they are one medium that allows making changes to design in such a way that it becomes better and more autonomous. I believe that social media are an ideal tool for designers to use in the process of designing a collection, which I intend to prove in my work.

2. ETHICAL FASHION

More and more people are disappointed and overwhelmed by today's pervasive and unbridled consumerism and its impact on society. Most consumers, however, besides mere disappointment, do not want to change their lives or shopping habits in a display of passive attitude, which contributes to growing frustration. Increasingly, however, oppositional social movements are appearing, driven by rebellion, resistance, boycott attempts and the desire to demonstrate the advantages of de-consumption, in a move against consumerism and "fast fashion" (i.e. fast, cheap chain fashion). This approach manifests itself not only in the ideological sphere and ethical views, but also in practice – for example, in everyday shopping choices.

For a member of a consumer society, it is almost impossible to completely avoid succumbing to the flood of goods and the pressure of constant product replacement.

The concept and mechanisms characterising the consumer society are broadly described by Zygmunt Bauman in his 1988 book "Wolność 2" ("Freedom 2") and in the vast majority of his later publications.

One of the modern world's characteristic phenomena most strongly emphasized by Bauman and whose manifestations are indisputably visible in the fashion industry, is the ubiquitous praise of transitoriness and contempt for permanence. The short lifespan of objects is extremely profitable, since it leads to their faster replacement by new ones, thus increasing market turnover and boosting consumption. "The consumer market recommends fast circulation of goods, shortening of the distance between use and disposal of objects and instantaneous exchange of things," Bauman points out.⁶

This leaves its mark not only on the cultural system, whose every manifestation – including fashion and trends – is shortened, but also on the psychology of consumers driven to constantly follow, observe and adapt to changes. Modern technology and social media, which "bombard" users with novelties, have become an ideal tool to drive and maintain this market order. For producers, the process of flooding the market with new products must be continuous, their exchange and circulation cannot stop: "if you connect to your server right after waking up – you will be reminded of this simple truth by the first message that appears on your screen: Are you ashamed of your cell phone? Your phone is so old that you feel uncomfortable using it? Get yourself a modern camera that you will be proud of." This recommendation implies the prohibition "to show up with the camera you made yourself the previous time".⁷

6 Z. Bauman, *Płynne życie*, transl. Tomasz Kunz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2007, p.94.

7 Z. Bauman, *Płynne życie*, transl. Tomasz Kunz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2007, p.18.

According to these assumptions, the most valuable consumer for the market is an individual extremely susceptible to new stimuli and novelties, while at the same time quickly losing interest in what recently desired and constantly engaged in the buying process. The aim is not to buy objects in order to accumulate but to get rid of and replace them with new items. As Bauman indicates, members of the consumerist society are characterised by instability of desires (leading to eternal dissatisfaction) and a tendency towards immediate consumption and immediate disposal of purchased items. The social media influencer or celebrity, who embodies a rich life of glamour amidst a multitude of items that he/she advertises and promotes on his social media channels, is presented as an ideal role model and authority.

Each fashion brand or the majority of designers enters into numerous collaborative relationships with people recognizable on the Internet, for marketing and promotional purposes as a way of directly impacting sales of collections. These collaborative relationships are regulated by a detailed contract, and can take different forms. One of them is “endorsement”, which involves the influencer supporting the brand and lending his image and name as well as other materials for advertising purposes (photo shoots, campaigns, ads), shared on the company’s channels. Another (the most desirable for brands) is the testimonial, which is a form of reference issued by a well-known person, based on the attested high value of the product, showing his/her alleged confidence in the company. This takes place on the influencer’s channels, so it reaches the audience directly, allowing brand recognition to be expanded to include new audiences. Regardless of the type of contract, these activities are intended to drive sales of as many products as possible to the consumer.

However, a growing part of society is becoming sceptical of the hyper-consumerist model of life and a passive attitude of mindless immersion in buying. This is caused in part by the growing awareness of the dangers of such a market system, the

the consequences of everyday consumer choices and the negative environmental impact, as well as the influence this has on workers participating in the clothing production process and the degradation of social ties.

Passive attitudes are contrasted with active attitudes, requiring the consumer to take action to improve the situation. To this end, modern civic circles have developed participatory tools with which to try to influence the condition of the market, as well as corporations and enterprises responsible for huge production. These activities are primarily aimed at creating information campaigns to raise consumer awareness, e.g. criticism (or even boycott) of companies engaging in unethical market and social behaviour, creation of content to reach investors directly, or involvement in social actions such as protests, blockades, pickets.

Thanks to the spread of information through numerous anti-consumer publications, numerous irregularities have been identified in the production processes of clothes all over the world, with the effect of raising ethical and ecological awareness among consumers. As a result, more and more companies began to listen to the voice of society and base their image-building strategies on the principles of sustainable development and fair trade in order to maintain sales at an appropriate level.

All of this has brought about the development of ethical fashion representing a shift towards the consumer, an alternative to the endless market dictatorship and unrestrained consumerism, which disdains the real needs of customers and focuses only on short-lived fads. It concentrates on an approach to clothing design, sourcing and production that maximises benefits to society (combating poverty, “cheap labour”, human exploitation, poor working conditions and unfair labour laws) while minimizing the negative environmental impact (reducing the use of harmful chemicals in

production, introducing more eco-friendly materials and components, minimising the use of water and energy resources, waste separation, recycling, honouring animal rights and reducing the percentage of animal products in collections).

Promoting the ethical dimension of fashion contributes not only to the improvement of the clothing production system, but above all to a change in consumer attitudes, with buyers becoming increasingly more discerning about quality and price, as well as the origin of the product.

Ethical and environmental awareness, both among companies and customers in Poland, is slowly gaining popularity, mainly thanks to the activities of numerous non-governmental organisations, undertaken through social media which nowadays are in a unique position to reach the widest possible audience. The organisations are united in the Clean Clothes Poland coalition which organises workshops, conferences, lectures, campaigns and appeals, as well as runs websites and social media profiles promoting sustainable, responsible fashion with the aim of activating consumers.⁸

An example of such an information campaign conducted in social media, which resonated very powerfully with the recipients of fashion, while also delivering a huge impact on the clothes design process, was the “Who Made My Clothes” campaign (appearing under the hashtag #whomademyclothes, which on Instagram alone has been posted 714,000 times and counting).

The global Fashion Revolution movement, during the Fashion Revolution Week, which took place from 18 April to 24 April 2017, created the #whomademyclothes campaign with the aim of drawing attention to transparency in clothing production,

8 J. Kall, A. Perchla-Włosik, A. Raciniewska, K. Sempruch-Krzemińska, Fashion brand. How to understand the fashion consumer and creating a tailor-made brand, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warsaw 2018, pp. 75-77.

which is most often ignored or even camouflaged by big brands. This is due to the fact that the process, by which corporations carry out large-scale production of clothes, very often violates labour and human rights, and causes a number of negative effects on the environment. According to statistics, in most Asian factories there are on average 1250 workers on 12-hour shifts every day, 7 days a week, sewing thousands of branded garments for a monthly wage of PLN 200 (which is lower than the poverty threshold set by the UN). Estimating all the costs of maintaining workers and production expenditures of particular lines, the average real price of one ready-made piece of clothing is no more than 5-7 PLN. This shows the enormous margin imposed on the product by clothing companies using workforce in China, and how much they are willing to exploit workers for their own profit.

Disclosing and spreading this kind of information on social media aims to point out trends in consumer behaviour and influence designers and brand founders to be socially transparent – over 1,000 brands and retailers and about 300 major fashion companies such as FatFace, Boden, American Apparel, Marimekko, Massimo Dutti, Warehouse and Zara responded to the “who made my clothes” call by posting information detailing the production process. However, as Maciej Skinderowicz from the Buy Responsibly Foundation points out in an interview for the Noizz platform, “slogans are only meaningful if, besides publicising the problem, they present solutions and alternatives. (...) More impact is achieved by initiatives that are obliging – appeals that can be signed by name. If a critical mass of signatures is reached and the initiative is joined by other NGOs, even within the European Union, the declaration, once in the right hands, can bring real solutions and results.⁹ The message itself changes consumer perceptions, but corporate response to such campaigns is likely to be of a commercial and marketing nature and will not impact production standards themselves.

9 <https://noizz.pl/lifestyle/how-they-are-who-made-my-clothes:61h7v32>, accessed on 01.11.2020



ILLUSTRATION 1

Irresponsible dealing by clothing manufacturers resulted in what was the biggest and most infamous industrial disasters – the collapse in 2013 of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh, which housed five clothing factories, supplying the Polish company LPP (or, more precisely, for their brand Cropp).

More than 1,100 workers died there and as many were hospitalized or reported missing under the rubble. The factories were housed in a building intended for use as a shopping centre, but two floors were illegally added to increase the production volume. The conditions in the factories themselves were appalling: overcrowded, long shifts with no paid overtime. The structure could not support the weight and collapsed. In response to this incident, Clean Clothes Poland conducted a campaign to publicize the problem of unethical market behaviour and sent a petition to the LPP board. Thanks to this, after half a year, under the pressure of consumers, the company started to improve the safety and security in the factories rented by them, and undertook to pay compensation to the families of the victims of the tragedy.

Social media campaigns such as #whomademyclothes are great at drawing the attention of the audience to the general problem of transparency in fashion, as they reach a wide range of users thanks to the large number of hashtags but can be based on a lie and used only to advance the interests of the manufacturers. Skinderowicz points out that "despite large reach, consumers may not be fully interested in the initiative, because clicking 'like' does not translate into purchase choices. When we're talking about an initiative that uses the photo as its tool, it is difficult to say whether the reach is proportional to the change, because media hype does not always go hand in hand the expected success, and sometimes quite the opposite. What appears on-line may not reflect the brand's actions in real life. Changing values requires direct engagement."¹⁰

For me, as a fashion designer, the aspect of direct engagement and transparency is very important, and social media is an ideal medium of communication between the audience and the brand. They are becoming a platform where we can present and sell our designs, but also tell our customers who created the product, who is responsible,

¹⁰ <https://noizz.pl/lifestyle/how-do-you-who-made-my-does:61h7v32>, accessed on 01.11.2020

what the production looks like and what the values of the brand are. In social media we become open for the recipients. The great advantage of this is that we can engage in direct contact with the customer, include him/her in the process of creation, while being aware that we have to reckon with the assessment and consequences of what we reveal as a brand.

On a national scale and taking all Polish into account, statistics show that Poland is very low on the awareness of the ethical fashion and slow fashion movements. However, there is no doubt that we can observe increasingly often the emergence of conscious ethical and ecological attitudes, especially among active online users.

As part of the research I conducted via social media, 61% of the people surveyed reported trying to buy clothes responsibly, i.e. with ecology and fair trade ethics in mind. The vast majority of them are aged between 25 and 40. This is in line with independent consumer research findings, suggesting that the thirtysomething age group, the generation growing up at the dawn of the ubiquitous technological environment, is by far the most aware and active when it comes to ethical fashion activities. This age group is influenced not only by well-developed, decisive ideological views, but also by conscious purchasing decisions when choosing products. In general, people who are active Internet users are becoming more and more inquisitive and sensitive to the strategies and dirty tricks of designers and clothing companies and there is no trouble in finding this out on social media. The initiative to change for the sake of fashion should come not only from the consumers, but above all from the clothing brands. Although bio, eco and slow collections are rising on the market and companies setting up whole departments to deal with public image, it still seems that these actions are more orientated towards making the brand more likeable rather than bring about a real breakthrough.

In 2020 alone, social media uncovered a number of unethical activities by Polish designers and influencers wishing to come across as professional people of fashion. Surprisingly, it was not NGOs or ecological coalitions that cried 'foul play' but social media users, that is ordinary consumers, who closely followed the profiles of clothing brands on the Internet, expecting the designers only to demonstrate credibility and truth in the profile message.

The first of a series of notorious cases was the so-called "label affair" (May 2020) around Veclaim T-shirts, a brand founded by the influencer Jessica Mercedes Kirschner, nominated for Elle Style Awards for Brand of the Year, appearing in numerous photo shoots in Vogue and other Polish magazines. The brand's core ideology accentuated by the company was to follow the trend of local production and support local businesses. The founder herself assured that all design work, from start to finish, including sewing, was done in Poland, which turned out to be a downright lie. Veclaim was clearly declaring itself to be a transparent brand by openly communicating that its clothes are fully Polish. In an explanation of the high prices of the clothes Mercedes, interviewed by Kozaczek news aggregator, said in late 2019: *"to make something cheaper, I would have to sew in China with cheaper materials and be on the level of chain stores, and it's not about that either. That is why we rely on natural fabrics, we sew in Poland (...) I would like it to be cheaper, but it is not possible."*¹¹

11 <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=iTzgAXH6raQ&feature=youtu.be>. accessed on 2.11.2020.



ILLUSTRATION

2

The scam was uncovered on 22 May, when stylist Karolina Domaradzka's Instagram Stories featured footage sent in by one of Veclaim's clients, showing that the T-shirts ostensibly designed by the Mercedes design team were in fact made-to-measure T-shirts from Fruit of The Loom, an American brand producing simple, basic promotional clothing that can be used for further processing, such as logo printing by other companies. The videos and photos showed an uncorrected defect in Veclaim's product – a double brand logo tag. The product received by the customer had both the Veclaim tag and the Fruit of The Loom tag on it. It turned out that Veclaim bought and imported ready-made products from abroad and only modified them (printing and ageing), thus misleading customers.

In response to the immediate reactions, with hundreds of messages from Internet users

and customers demanding explanation, Veclaim has blocked comments on its Instagram profile, and the slogan “all our products are made in Poland” disappeared from the “about us” section of its website sewn in Poland. Due to the fact that the ageing and printing of the shirts was done locally, Veclaim was legally allowed to advertise the clothes as being made in Poland. Social media, however, was in an uproar. Not only customers but also journalists who recommended and advertised Veclaim on their profiles as well as in magazines felt outraged and fooled: *“What was all that talk about transparency and local sewing worth? Where is brand credibility? Where is journalist credibility? We encouraged people to support the Polish fashion, meanwhile, Jessica Mercedes’ Veclaim turned out to be more of a dye workshop rather than a designer brand. (...) I don’t know how she could do that to thousands of girls who looked up to her, who saved their pocket money or first salaries to have something with the Veclaim brand on it. They felt betrayed. They will not trust young Polish brands again, promising themselves that they will not be fooled again. This will hit many honest designers,”* wrote Michał Zaczyński in a blog post, a journalist who has published in Polityka, Vogue and Newsweek, on his blog.

Marta Karwacka, the founder of Sensa, a business consultancy company providing advice on corporate social responsibility and blog owner at Howtowearfair.com has this to say about ethics in the fashion industry: *“this dispute shows that in Poland there is a growing segment of vigilant consumers and they are not indifferent to the question of responsibility, although I do not go into the motivations of the criticism. I can imagine that among the thousands of customers commenting today, there are those for whom the quality and responsibility of the brand really matters and they feel very disappointed, but also those who feel cheated by their idol. Statistically speaking, a small percentage of consumers make their purchasing decisions consciously – in the sense of social and environmental responsibility – and yet a wave of criticism, or even hate, has been poured on the brand. This is proof that you shouldn’t take*

12 <https://michalzaczynski.com/2020/06/10/joanna-od-luksusu-iessica-od-biznesu-czego-nauczylus-afery-metkowe-w-polskiej-moda/>, accessed on 02.11.2020

responsibility lightly, which unfortunately happens a lot these days.”¹³



See more on Instagram

VOI
166 likes
howtowearfair

In recent days, the @veclaim brand has come under criticism. Customers have discovered that Veclaim-printed T-shirts are actually Fuit of the Loomuz t-shirts with prints and rebranded as Veclaim. Customers felt cheated... If the brand really assured that all products are made in Poland, because the owner @emeredc cares about supporting the local community, then I understand the scale of the outrage. I keep my fingers crossed for her rebuilding customer trust. But...this situation is a reminder that many brands that want to fit into the social responsibility fashion unfortunately very often don't understand it. Most often this happens because of marketing departments that are trying to embrace responsibility as just another trend and another task. And that's not at all like that. If you're telling someone "I'm fair to you," it can't just be a promotional message. Responsibility is a way of generating profit, and much more than a marketing strategy or paying taxes, which we read about in a brand statement. It is the about company's values being consistent with its actions, communication and brand owner. I don't assume this was the case with Veclaim, but we know that there are companies that want to play with trust in order to sell a product... Today there are less and less of them, because responsibility is gaining importance, companies are realizing that there are alert and aware consumers, journalists, employees and suppliers. At @sense_sustainable thinking we see this change in attitude, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Simply put, many brands don't know how to approach responsibility systematically and strategically, how to weave it into company structures, how to integrate it into the corporate culture. But it's good that they realize that this topic needs to be taken seriously, especially if they want to be a responsible brand. So, dear brands, don't take responsibility for granted, it doesn't pay off in the long run. Really. Start thinking about it strategically, honestly and fairly. #howtowearfair #markarowicka #veclaim #sustainablefashion #responsibilitystrategy #ethicalfashion #takefashion #lastfashion #slowfashion #truestory #prcrisis #polishbrand see all comments (10)



See more on Instagram

C> Q j³
296 likes
michalzaczynski

The pandemic concerns us all, it has re-evaluated and changed our lives, but it is also worth mentioning other events that marked a turning point. In the clothing industry The Rana Beach disaster in Bangladesh is one such event - or at least we are doing everything we can to make it one. Over one thousand one hundred people sewing cheap clothes for us died. Today is another anniversary of the event and again we ask together with @fash_rev#whomademyclothes? So dear @allsaints @cosstores @boss @hermes@sandroparis (as for the coat @peltziszaryton I left in the coat check I know who made it, because I personally met the tailors and designers) - who made mine? #fash_revpoland #csr #ecofashion #ranaplaza #sustainablefashion #stopsweatshops »panredaktor #photography by @est_by_s see all comments

Add comment...

(5)



ILLUSTRATION 3

Using off-the-shelf items is a common practice and there is nothing wrong with that. Absence of a clear indication of the item's origin is a different story. You know very well that I wish no one ill. This is about the basic right to product information. No matter what brand we're talking about. This situation has a ripple effect on other brands, calling into question Polish production, as well as people who supported and recommended @veclaim in good faith. Criticism is inevitable here, but what I would ask is that you refrain from hating. The difference is clear, but the line is easy to cross.

13 <https://www.google.com/amp/s/noizz.pl/fashion/jessica-mercedes-odpowiada-na-zarzuty-wobec-brands-veclaim/wqc52q.amp>, accessed on 02.11.2020.

After some time, the Veclaim brand manager posted a clarifying statement on social media regarding whole situation, but the arguments could not appease the disappointed Internet users. The founder of Veclaim also addressed the issue, assuring that *“I did not and do not intend to mislead anyone. I apologize to everyone who felt bad about this situation.”*¹⁴ In an image-saving effort, she also promised that in the near future she would show nuts and bolts of the Veclaim brand, including the sewing facility, the clothing manufacture process and everything that goes into making the final product.

Despite numerous attempts to explain the situation, the Veclaim’s brand credibility took a nose dive and its image will never be the same again. However, the “label affair” may be seen as an opportunity to launch a more conscious information campaign about the production of clothes in Poland, the overuse of declarations of being part of a local trend as well as a sort of fetishisation of the slogan “Polish sewing facility” in the clothing companies’ brand statements that make an increasingly frequent appearance on brand websites. The message “made in Poland” is beginning to grow into a symbol of quality, sustainable production model and a sign of support for Polish companies – especially in the context of the Covid-19-related economic crisis. However, we only need to look at Clean Clothes Poland reports to realize that local production is not that great and does not always guarantee quality and ethical working conditions. In these difficult times, not only for the economy but also for the society’s mental well-being, credibility is something we look for and expect in our environment. Especially when we have at our disposal (both as consumers and designers) such communication tools as social media, which enable us to verify every doubtful message in real time.

14 <https://noizz.pl/fashion/eksperci-o-awanturze-wokol-marki-veclaim-za-ktora-stoi-jessica-mercedes/2syt347amg>, accessed on 02.11.2020

Jessica Mercedes repeatedly stressed that the “label affair” gave her a lot of food for thought, serving as a good lesson not only in communication but also in the design process. She did not deliver on the promises, as a few months later another Veclaim fraud was uncovered by social media users. In November 2020, stylist Monika Tomczak pointed out on her Instagram profile that some Veclaim clothes are deceptively similar to the American brand Collina Strada’s 2019 collections. Karolina Domaradzka also reported the story on InstaStories. In this case, however, Mercedes did not publish any explanations, ignoring the allegations.¹⁵

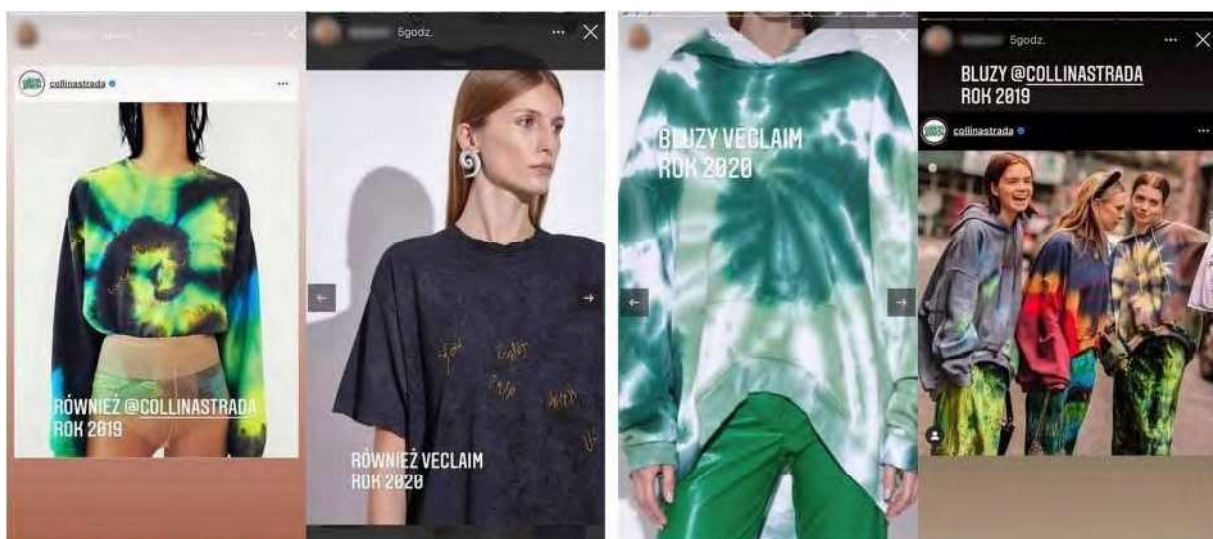


ILLUSTRATION 4

Another example of unethical design policy is the activity of the Polish brand MISBHV. Here, we are not talking about a one-time “slip-up” noticed by internet users, but a systematic, repeated action based on plagiarism and intellectual property theft from other creators, on which the MISBHV’s entire design model relies. Indeed, despite the fact that all illegal activities are recorded and documented by numerous websites and social media profiles (e.g. Facebook fanpage @Memebhv entirely dedicated to exposing plagiarism), MISBHV continues to be among the most popular and

¹⁵<https://natemat.pl/amp/326353.kolejna-afeta-z-veclaim-jessiki-mercedes-podobienstwo-do-collina-strada> accessed on 2.11.2020

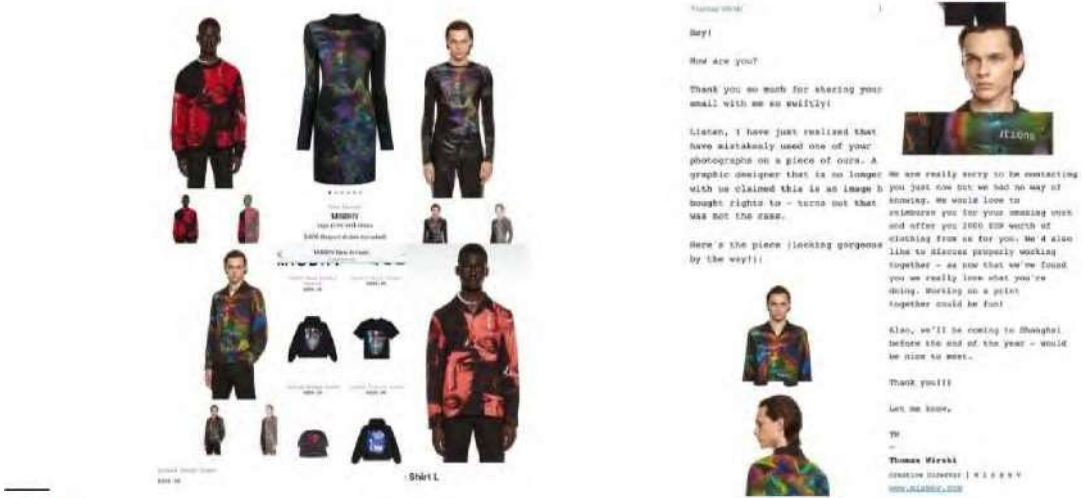
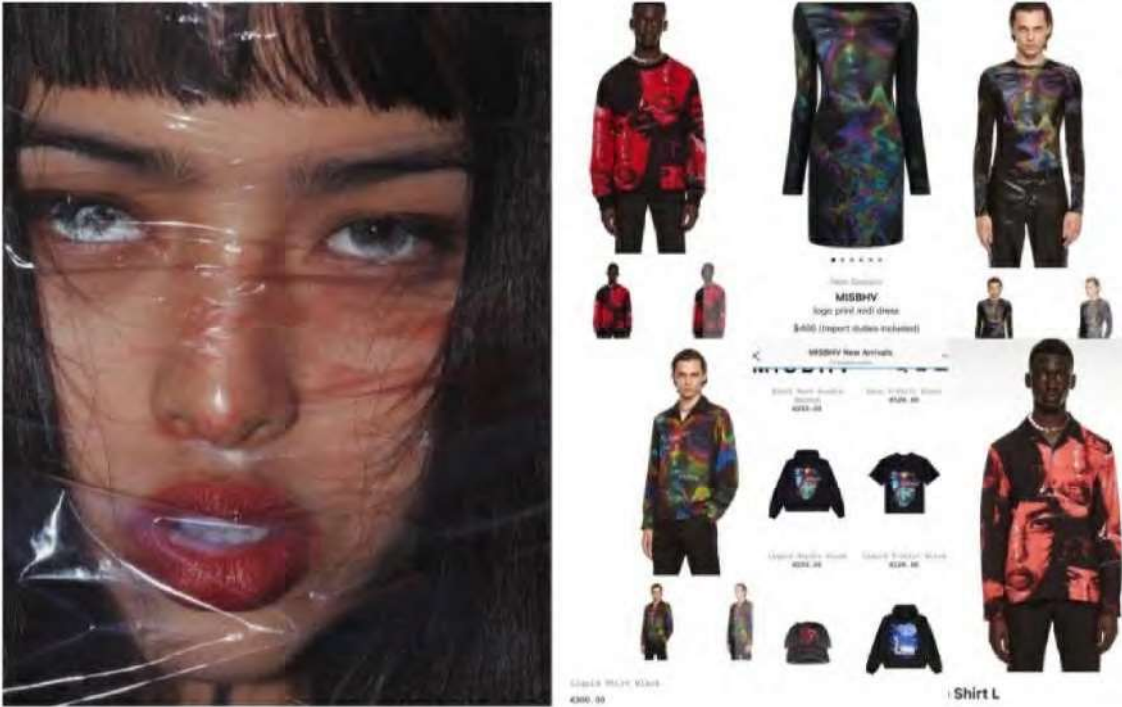
internationally successful Polish streetwear brands, with top music stars and celebrities, including Rihanna, Dua Lipa, the Kardashian and Jenner sisters, 50 Cent and ASAPRocky, wearing its clothes. Their portfolio also includes collaboration with Comme des Garçons and Reebok, and their campaigns often support the feminist movement or national minorities in line with the pro-social ideology. The media in Poland and abroad support MISBHV, writing about their international successes, proudly publishing all their projects. It is surprising why they do not mention their activities. This leaves many of the brand's customers unaware of MISBHV's unethical conduct, and the designers themselves, Natalia Maczek and Tomek Wirski, maintain their position in the fashion market despite years of violating copyright law. From time to time, news articles surface, publicizing the brand's actions, especially on social media or websites, but never in the traditional media. During the last wave of scandals, the latest high-profile theft of MISBHV was discussed by Fashion Business, Michał Zaczyński, Elle, Pudelek and Fashion PR Talks, to name just a few.¹⁶

This particular case related to the theft of photos taken by a photographer from Shanghai who publishes his works on Instagram under the name @Hqeivy. Without the artist's consent, MISBHV appropriated his works and printed them as graphics on T-shirts, shirts, sweatshirts and dresses in the latest collection. The photographer responded and tried to clarify the situation by posting a statement on his profile with a copy of an e-mail received from MISBHV Creative Director Tomasz Wirski. In the e-mail, which tried to clarify the brand's position on the matter, Wirski blamed what he referred to as an "oversight" on a designer who no longer worked for MISBHV, further claiming that the designer was tasked to purchase copyrights from the Shanghai artist and agree on the terms of purchase. As compensation, Wirski offered @Hqeivy a shopping voucher worth two thousand euros, to which the artist rightly replied that

¹⁶<https://fashionbiznes.pl/klamstwa-misbhv/>, <https://michalzaczynski.com/2020/06/10/joanna-od-luxury-jessica-from-business-what-we-learned-about-metscandals-in-polish-fashion/>, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.elle.pl/artykul/amp/misbhv-w-ogniu-krytyki-polska-marka-uzyla-illegally-photographed-one-of-the-photographers-and-printed-it-on-new-collection-clothes>, https://www.pudelek.pl/artykul/136396/misbhv_sprzedaje_bluzy_z_okladka_amerykanskiego_zespolu_cena_500_zlotych_fani_obraz_zostal_skopiowany_bezprawnie/?amp=1, <http://fashionprtalks.pl/teksty/polsko-azjatycka-afiera-modowa>, accessed on 05.11.2020

the amount was just enough to buy a jacket from MISBHV, which cannot be an accurate estimation of the losses his intellectual property suffered.¹⁷

Photo by photographer @hqeivy and designs by MISBHV



17 ILLUSTRATION 5

This is not the only case of MISBHV’s misappropriation of other creators’ intellectual property has come to light. One can find a number of other examples of unethical behaviours of the brand on social media:

Nico +the faction album cover



source: Facebook/@Memebhv

3. Album cover of the American band SLEEP CHAMBER – Submit to Desire



source: Facebook/@Memebhv

Cover of the book Lenteric *Voi avec effraction douce*



source: Facebook/@Memebhv

4. A leaflet advertising the London club CLUB M FI from 1988



source: Facebook/@Memebhv

5. A theme from Drax's album cover – Red



Source: Facebook/(a)Momebhv

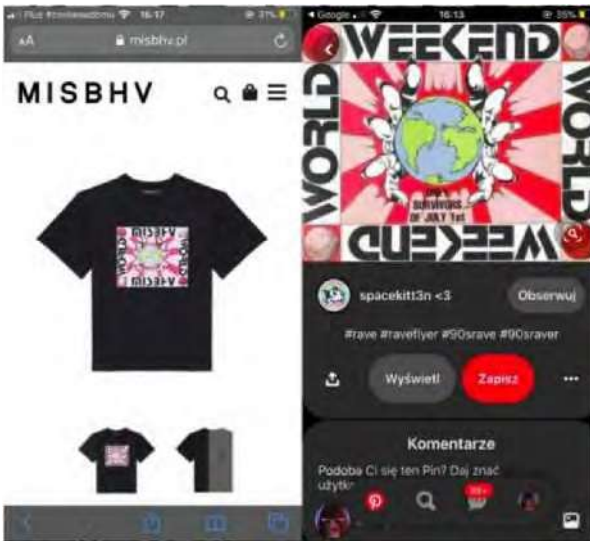
7. TRANCE 5000 poster



ILLUSTRATION 7

source: Facebook/@Memebhv

6. 1990s Rave flyer.



source: Facebook/@Memebhv

Another high-profile social media scandal concerned Joanna Przetakiewicz and her brand La Mania. Przetakiewicz, a lawyer by education, is known to the public mainly for her relationship with Jan Kulczyk, started in 2005. At that time, the media started taking an interest in her, which is when her career as a “celebrity” began.