

# PHYGITAL FASHION WEEK

- A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE CONTEMPORARY  
COPENHAGEN FASHION WEEK

Thesis for Two-Year Master, 30 ECTS  
Fashion Marketing and Management

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## **Abstract**

The value of fashion week's physical presence has been questioned in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, when fashion week became fully digital. Once the pandemic subsided, the digital attributes were retained and combined with the physical space, resulting in a phygital fashion week. This new phenomenon, the contemporary fashion week that combines on-site and online activities, has therefore received little academic research. There is a lack of academic knowledge about how the post-pandemic setting of fashion week affects the physical value.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the post-pandemic setting of fashion week has affected the value of physical presence in regards to marketing communication through the lens of Copenhagen Fashion Week (CPHFW). By conducting a case study of CPHFW, the goal is to bridge the gap by providing new research within the field of fashion marketing. A qualitative research approach was used to provide an in-depth perspective of CPHFW. The chosen data collection techniques were a combination of ethnographic and netnographic methods. The ethnographic methods were conducted on-site, physically at the AW 23 season of CPHFW, while the netnographic methods analyzed activities online, thus communication through social media platforms as well as press coverage.

The results of this study indicate that there is a strong interdependence between the digital and physical fashion week, where the digital do not have an obvious position of power because it is dependent on the physical presence. Fashion week has evolved into a phenomenon conducted physically, with the aim of reaching a digital audience through the creation of spectacular on-site moments being shared online. This points to a complex power relationship between the two. Therefore, the value of physical presence remains strong in a post-pandemic setting of fashion week in regards to marketing communication. In terms of Copenhagen, the emerging fashion capital, the translation of the physical presence to the digital realm becomes even more important as it promotes its fashion week to a global audience. It enables CPHFW to communicate elements of differentiation digitally, thus strengthening the attractiveness of the physical presence.

**Keywords:** Fashion Marketing, Fashion Week, Phygital, Gatekeeping, Exclusivity, Buzz Marketing, Social Media

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# Table of Contents

<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>- 1 -</b>
1.1 PROBLEMATIZATION, PURPOSE, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	- 2 -
1.2 DELIMITATIONS.....	- 2 -
<b>2 METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>- 4 -</b>
2.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN.....	- 4 -
2.2 DATA COLLECTION.....	- 4 -
2.2.1 Ethnographic Methods.....	- 5 -
2.2.2 Netnographic Methods.....	- 6 -
2.3 DATA ANALYSIS.....	- 7 -
2.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS.....	- 7 -
2.5 RESEARCH ETHICS.....	- 8 -
<b>3 LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>- 9 -</b>
3.1 THE FASHION SYSTEM.....	- 9 -
3.2 THE HISTORY OF FASHION WEEK.....	- 9 -
3.3 FASHION WEEK AND SOCIAL MEDIA.....	- 10 -
3.4 COPENHAGEN - THE EMERGING FASHION CAPITAL.....	- 11 -
<b>4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>- 13 -</b>
4.1 GATEKEEPING.....	- 13 -
4.2 EXCLUSIVITY.....	- 14 -
4.3 BUZZ MARKETING.....	- 15 -
<b>5 RESULTS.....</b>	<b>- 17 -</b>
5.1 COPENHAGEN FASHION WEEK AW 23.....	- 17 -
5.2 FASHION SHOWS.....	- 17 -
5.3 EVENTS.....	- 19 -
5.4 SOCIAL MEDIA AND PRESS COVERAGE.....	- 20 -
5.4.1 Copenhagen Fashion Week.....	- 20 -
5.4.2 Brands.....	- 21 -
5.4.3 Influencers.....	- 22 -
5.4.4 Magazines.....	- 22 -
<b>6 DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>- 24 -</b>
6.1 COPENHAGEN - THE EMERGING FASHION CAPITAL.....	- 24 -
6.1.1 Copenhagen Fashion Week and Sustainability.....	- 24 -
6.1.2 Scandinavian Fashion, Vibe Shift, and Street Style.....	- 25 -
6.2 A PHYGITAL FASHION WEEK.....	- 27 -
6.2.1 Awareness and Exclusivity.....	- 27 -
6.2.2 The Insider Roles.....	- 30 -
6.2.3 The Strategic Front Row.....	- 31 -
6.2.4 Social Media Attention.....	- 33 -
<b>7 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>- 37 -</b>
<b>REFERENCE LIST.....</b>	<b>- 39 -</b>

# 1 Introduction

Liquid metallics, bright colors, sheer layers, denim, and glitz were seen all around, worn by guests queuing for one of the shows during fashion week. The sun had just set and Copenhagen Fashion Week (CPHFW) was in full action, where all three of us were present to observe the phenomenon. The excitement could be felt in the air with guests eager to enter the venue. By the entrance, several brand employees kept track of the invitation list and allowed only invitees to enter, indicating that this was an exclusive event. The atmosphere was close to chaotic, the queue was growing, employees were stressed, VIP guests were being dropped off by taxis right at the entrance, along with multiple photographers capturing the happening. As we did not have an invitation to the show, we were positioned to the side of the entrance to wait for possible seats available, along with a group of fifteen others. The anticipation was high among the group, as the employees kept a positive attitude indicating we would be able to enter shortly. Suddenly, the doors were shut and everyone looked at each other and laughed in confusion. After a couple of minutes, the music from the show started and we realized that we were not going to get in. Instead, we watched the live streamed show on YouTube, which made us reflect on the purpose of physically being there.

The same thought has been widely discussed in the fashion field in regards to fashion week. Years before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, actors such as brands, designers, and buyers began to question the value of participating on-site at fashion week. The demise of fashion week has been predicted for about a decade, but it is only in recent years that they have peaked (Baskin 2021). While brands and designers want to showcase their new collections and generate publicity, the buyers are there to bring the collections to the consumers (Kawamura 2005). These two functions are the main purposes of fashion week. However, the focus of this study will be on the first mentioned function, i.e. generating publicity, and thus analyzed from a marketing perspective.

Furthermore, when the pandemic hit in early 2020, the future of fashion week was discussed as fashion shows and events were canceled and had to adapt to digital formats, since most of the industry's key players, e.g. celebrities, influencers, fashion executives, and models were unable to travel outside their home cities (Amed 2020). This led to conversations among industry professionals regarding the advantages and disadvantages of digital versus physical shows, where some saw the digital solutions as a big opportunity to change the industry and tackle issues, e.g. sustainability concerns, while others were more skeptical and saw it as an obstacle for engagement (Yotka 2020). Moreover, fashion week faced major challenges when the restrictions hit and had to find new ways to promote their digital fashion shows (Reuters 2021). The first season of fully digital fashion weeks premiered in the summer and according to Baskin (2021) it was considered a challenge that somehow seemed to work in regards to the circumstances. The pandemic was not seen to be over anytime soon, making it necessary to keep experimenting with the digital formats to present fashion (Amed 2020). The digital fashion weeks got improved by practice as well as new tech developments, and by the second season it was starting to become clear that the online format will remain, pandemic or not (Baskin 2021).

During the fall of 2021, fashion week slowly started to open up again for physical fashion shows. In the initial awakening of fashion week after the pandemic, physical shows were conducted in highly restricted settings, with only a limited number of seats available. Still,

many designers decided to show their upcoming collections digitally (Sherman 2020). One year later, fashion week was almost back to its previous state prior to the pandemic, but the digital developments of fashion week were still lingering as they were seen as valuable for brands in terms of attracting attention (Malleveys 2022). Thus, making fashion week a phygital event (Yotka 2021), a term coined by Chris Weil in 2007 originally applied to marketing communications (Talent Formation 2023). The term phygital indicates a hybrid experience, as in a combination of the physical and digital attributes to connect with the audience (Batat 2022). In recent years, the term has also been applied to the field of fashion, where a phygital fashion week refers to both physical and digital activities. This means combining physical shows and events with digital live streams (Yotka 2021).

## **1.1 Problematization, Purpose, and Research Questions**

There is no doubt that the pandemic has raised questions about the value of physical fashion weeks in terms of fashion marketing. Concerns were brought forth by major actors years prior to the pandemic as a result of the rise in digital and fast-paced society, while the pandemic has accelerated these concerns due to the new technological developments (Baskin 2021). The ability to gain access and view fashion shows, events, and street-styles online, puts everything into a new perspective and therefore raises the questions: Why gather a small crowd in one venue, when the same show is accessible to everyone through social media? These thoughts were brought up when observing the large crowd waiting to enter the venue of the fashion show, even though there was a possibility to stream the show online, suggesting that there is a strong desire to attend physically. Furthermore, previous research discusses aspects of digitization related to fashion week (Rocamora 2017; Lou and Yan 2019; Dunn 2018). However, the research has been conducted prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, there is a lack of academic knowledge regarding how the contemporary post-pandemic setting of fashion week, as in a combination of digital and physical events, affects the physical value.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze how the post-pandemic setting of fashion week has affected the value of physical presence in regards to marketing communication through the lens of CPHFW. By conducting a case study of CPHFW, through a combination of ethnographic field work and netnography of the phenomenon, the goal is to bridge the gap by providing new knowledge within the field of fashion marketing. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: What elements of Copenhagen Fashion Week contribute to Copenhagen emerging as a fashion capital and what impact do they have on marketing?

RQ 2: How does the combination of an on-site and digital approach of Copenhagen Fashion Week affect marketing communication?

## **1.2 Delimitations**

The scope of the study focuses on a case study of CPHFW Autumn/Winter 2023 (AW 23). In terms of the cities that have been studied in relation to fashion week, the main focus has been on the Big Four, consisting of the fashion capitals New York, Paris, Milan, and London.

However, there has been a global rise in popularity of Danish fashion, which according to (Ahmed 2017) has led to a significant increase in press, international buyers and street style activity at CPHFW. This made fashion week in Copenhagen an interesting event to study. Furthermore, the study is narrowed down to CPHFW that was held between 31st of January and 3rd of February 2023, showcasing AW 23 collections. This is due to this fashion week being highly relevant in relation to the pandemic, as it was the return of the first physical Autumn/Winter fashion week in Copenhagen without any restrictions. However, as the online attributes of fashion week still remained evident at CPHFW AW 23, it was important to not only capture the physical presence, but also the digital presence to understand the post-pandemic setting of the fashion week and its implications on marketing.

## **2 Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodology choices for the study are presented. First, the research approach and design are accounted for. The ethnographic and netnographic methods for data collection are explained below, followed by a presentation of the analysis process. Finally, methodological concerns and research ethics are discussed to provide a critical view of the chosen methods.

### **2.1 Research Approach and Design**

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study. This methodological approach was found suitable as the study aims to contribute to an analysis of how the value of the physical presence of fashion week has been affected by the post-pandemic setting. In order to provide this in-depth perspective on the phenomenon, it was crucial to gather information from actors participating and engaging in CPHFW. The gathering of information was conducted through dialogues and observations. Bryman (2016) argues that the gathering of non-numerical data, rather than numerical data, is one of the main attributes of a qualitative study and crucial to provide an understanding of underlying meanings and perspectives.

The chosen research design was an ethnographic case study, as this research aims to answer the research questions through the lens of CPHFW. According to Bryman (2016), a case study is associated with a detailed and in-depth focus on a community, location, or organization to understand the nature of the phenomenon, which can be carried out through an ethnographic research method. An ethnographic research method entails a process of gathering data through fieldwork, which can include interviews, observations, and participation (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). In addition to conducting an ethnographic research method at CPHFW, a netnographic research method was also used to gather data online. According to Kozinets (2020), this method can be understood as ethnography in the realm of online environments, which allows for an analysis of online cultures and communities. As the post-pandemic setting of fashion week includes both physical and digital fashion shows and events, it was of great importance to not only gather data from observations and interviews on-site, but to also gather data online from social media and press coverage, in order to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

### **2.2 Data collection**

The chosen data collection techniques for this study were a combination of ethnographic and netnographic methods. The ethnographic methods were conducted on-site, i.e. physically at fashion week, while the netnographic methods analyze activities online, i.e. what is communicated through social media platforms and covered by the press. In the chapter presenting the results, some brands are anonymous and some are not. The anonymity of certain brands depends on how the data is collected, where information gathered from ethnographic methods are anonymous and data from netnographic methods are not. This is due to some data being considered sensitive in terms of the relationship between the authors and the actors observed.

## 2.2.1 Ethnographic methods

Observations were conducted of actors involved at different types of activities at CPHFW, which was suitable for this study, as Pickard (2017) states that observations are carried out to explore presence, detect behaviors, and interactions. A combination of two types of observations were done on-site at CPHFW, participant and non-participant observations. The researchers' role within these observation methods is what distinguishes them from each other, according to Moisander and Valtonen (2006). Prior to conducting the observations, requests to attend fashion shows and events were sent out to 15 brands via email, out of which four brands responded. Three rejections and one acceptance were received, where one brand offered all three of us to work as seaters during their fashion show, due to personal connection.

In the case of participant observation, the researchers made observations while attending particular settings and actively taking part in its activities, which according to Moisander and Valtonen (2006) allows an insider's perspective. Participant observations were conducted by attending Fashion Show 1, an After Party, and a Fashion Event. The first participating observation included being seaters at Fashion Show 1, which involved greeting attendees and assisting with the seating. The observation took place during a time span of four hours, which allowed several subsequent dialogues with guests and brand employees and thus enabled a deeper understanding of the observed setting. The participating roles at the After Party and the Fashion Event involved being guests. The observation at the After Party lasted for approximately three hours and the observation for the Fashion Event lasted for 30 minutes. Data was mainly gathered from observations and subsequent dialogues with the respondents accounted for in Table 1. However, several additional informal interactions were made throughout the fashion week with approximately 35 invitees, in order to gather a holistic perspective of the studied phenomenon.

Table 1: Respondents During Observations

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ROLE</b>
Alina	Brand Associate
Bettina	Street Style Photographer
Clara	Global Relations Manager
Dorthea	Social Media Coordinator
Eline	Marketing Manager

In terms of non-participant observation, Moisander and Valtonen (2006) argue that the role is to observe naturalistic behavior from an outside perspective, while not taking part in the activities. Non-participant observations were conducted before and after Fashion Show 2, which lasted for one and a half hours in total, as well as the street style scene of CPHFW, which was conducted throughout the fashion week. These observations enabled data collection of naturally occurring interactions and behaviors, without the situation being disrupted. The observations were held on-site in Copenhagen during the entire fashion week, from the 31st of January to the 3rd of February 2023.

During the participant and non-participant observations, the respondents were informed about the questions being asked for study purposes. The dialogues emerged from the environment in which the observations took place. According to Klenke, Martin, and Wallace (2016), this allows flexibility and opens for discussion, allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions based on the given answers. This results in greater social interaction and gives off a relaxed impression, containing open-ended questions emerging from the surrounding context, in accordance with what Klenke, Martin and Wallace (2016) argue as advantages of the method. Furthermore, the answers differed among the respondents due to the diverse questions, which resulted in variations in the gathered information. This could in turn limit the response comparability, making the outcome more difficult to analyze. However, although unstructured dialogues could provide less factual information, they contribute to a general understanding of a certain topic (Klenke, Martin and Wallace 2016). Thus, the dialogues strengthened and provided additional value to the gathered information during the observations.

Mulhall (2003) emphasizes that observations, both participant and non-participant, are essential when gathering data to get the whole picture of a phenomenon, capture context, provide knowledge about interactions between groups, and inform about the effects of physical presence. Thus, a combination of these observation approaches have been used as the mentioned outcomes are of key interest in regards to the purpose of this study, which aims to analyze the post-pandemic effects on the physical presence in regards to marketing communication. Furthermore, field notes were taken during the observations as well as immediately after observations and dialogues, which according to Leymarie (2014) is a tool to describe the events observed as well as enabling reflection when they occur.

### **2.2.2 Netnographic methods**

To understand how CPHFW is communicated and portrayed in social media and press, data was collected by scanning Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and several fashion magazines one week before, during, and one week after the fashion week. CPHFW primarily uses Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for marketing communication purposes, making these platforms the most accurate to examine in this case study. According to Kozinets (2020), investigating these online platforms allows discretion, which according to Puri (2007) makes it possible to investigate the platforms' natural environment. Because of its discretion, the data provides insights of these social media users' natural platform activity (Puri 2007). Prior and Miller (2012) state that a netnographic setting might limit the research potential as it cannot scope the offline communication within the studied group. As this research combines studies of the offline and online setting of CPHFW, an attempt is made to cover both the digital and physical presence.

A global fashion week community has been built on Instagram and TikTok where actors, i.e. brands, influencers, celebrities, and press, are engaging. Apart from studying CPHFW's own social media accounts, the social media activity from fashion brands involved in hosting fashion shows during the AW 23 season of CPHFW were studied. Additionally, several Instagram and TikTok accounts of influencers, celebrities, and magazines attending the fashion week were reviewed in order to get a picture of what was published and communicated online. When studying these accounts, online traces connected to CPHFW were searched for, which according to Kozinets (2020) are posted images, videos, text, comments, shares etc. The online traces that were published in a CPHFW context were

derived from both Instagram and TikTok. The selection of content was made by identifying the type of content posted by different actors involved in the fashion week, the collaborations conducted, and the type of content that received attention in form of likes, comments and views. Furthermore, the engagement on fashion show live streams was analyzed on both YouTube and Instagram. Additionally, several fashion magazines were studied to obtain press coverage of CPHFW, which were identified via shares on Instagram as well as via Google's search engine by using the keyword CPHFW AW 23. During the netnographic data collection, a purposive sampling method was used, which according to Pickard (2017) is used to identify information-rich sources from which to draw data. Multiple sources, i.e. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and magazines, were identified as useful for the research purpose and were systematically sorted in Google Drive. This was a way to maintain control of the structure that emerged during the data collection process (Pickard 2017). Each source of information was sorted into a folder, categorized by its area of interest in relation to the study, e.g. Instagram was categorized into influencers, brands, magazines, and organizations.

## **2.3 Data analysis**

In order to analyze the gathered data, a qualitative content analysis has been used. According to Bryman (2016), this process of analysis focuses on distinguishing patterns within the collected data in order to identify themes. This process began by carefully selecting data for analysis, where the systematic collection of data in different folders allowed a reduction of data unrelated to the research questions. This is a crucial first step in a qualitative content analysis according to Cho and Lee (2014), as it narrows down the data and relates it to the purpose of the study. Furthermore, the next step in the analysis process was focused on distinguishing categories from the selected data. This was done by examining the content and topics of the selected data to find similar patterns. Based on this, the data was divided into different categories of which their content related to. Lastly, themes were extracted from the distinguished categories. Identifying themes allows for a deeper understanding and interpretation of the gathered data (Bryman 2016). It also allows for an exploration of underlying meanings and context of the data from the standpoint of the stated research questions (Cho and Lee 2014). Furthermore, the results have been analyzed in relation to the conceptual framework, together with our own reflections and interpretations.

## **2.4 Methodological Concerns**

There are several factors that affect the research quality of the gathered data. Phoenix (2013) argues that gender, age, and status of the researcher and respondents can affect the outcome of the study. Our presence synced well with the environment of fashion week, as we demonstrated a certain type of fashion knowledge and interest in fashion as those involved in CPHFW. Because of our style, which was in line with those attending fashion week, we were able to give the impression of belongingness. This was advantageous for our observations, since we did not stand out from the crowd and those observed could thus behave naturally and undisturbed. In addition to this, when working as seaters during a participant observation, we were considered professionals, which allowed us to be perceived as an extension of the brand and thus gave us a certain prestige. The mentioned factors also affect the quality of the data from the conducted dialogues, as it can be assumed that the respondents were able to

establish a social relationship with us as researchers. Our knowledge, style, and perceived status were able to provide a basis for comfort and openness in the dialogue settings, which could have a positive effect on the quality of the data collected. However, our role as researchers during CPHFW could have negatively affected the quality of our results in terms of accessibility of data. In situations related to fashion week, a researcher does not signal status of prestige in the same way as for example being an invited influencer or brand representative. Therefore, when not acting in relation to a certain brand, this could have affected our credibility in certain situations as well as it led to not being able to participate in some exclusive activities during CPHFW.

## **2.5 Research Ethics**

Bryman (2016) presents ethical principles that should be taken into consideration when conducting research. These include lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. Lack of informed consent refers to whether or not the participants have enough information about the study to make a decision of participation, invasion of privacy refers to whether or not the participants have the right to privacy, and deception refers to whether or not the participants are informed of the true purpose of the study (Bryman 2016). Our identity as researchers were shared to the respondents when conducting subsequent dialogues during observations. However, when interacting with the fashion show attendees while having the role as seaters as well as when conducting observations, it was not possible to share this information as it would have been disruptive. This might have had an effect on the gathered data, as someone who is unaware of a study perhaps shares different information than someone who is aware. This might have led to the possibility of lack of consent in this study, which Bryman (2016) means is common in ethnographic research, as it is not considered practicable to inform the purpose of a study to everyone that a researcher comes in contact with. However, to those who got the information about the study, including all the respondents, the true purpose has been communicated and there has been no deception involved. Furthermore, there was no invasion of privacy in the study, as the asked questions were not related to personal information of the participants. Instead, the respondents were asked questions related to fashion week and responded as a representative of a brand or profession.

Furthermore, ethical aspects are important to consider when collecting, presenting, disclosing and interpreting data from the internet, including social media and public sites (Kozinets 2020). As part of our research, information is gathered from social media users. When it comes to social media, the researcher must account for whether or not an user's post is automatically given unspoken consent to be used in research (Kozinets 2020). The social media users used in this study include influencers, brands, magazines, and organizations, all of which have chosen to have their accounts public. These accounts not only share their posts with a great following, but also promote themselves in relation to CPHFW and can therefore be considered as unspoken consent. Data that has been collected from magazines, i.e. public sites, is according to Kozinets (2020) considered as public data and therefore usable in research. In terms of images collected during observations both on-site and online, it is difficult to anonymize and illustrate them. Therefore, we have chosen to not include images from the data collection. The images are kept in a personal archive, available upon request, and will be deleted after publication of the study.

### **3 Literature Review**

This chapter provides an overview of fashion week's role in the fashion industry, its historical significance and evolution, as well as how social media has influenced the concept and why the emerging fashion capital Copenhagen has gained widespread attention. The chapter is based on scientific articles, although in some cases popular science articles are used as a supplement due to the contemporary nature of the research topic. This literature review, together with the upcoming conceptual framework, provides a foundation to understand and discuss the results as well as answer the research questions.

#### **3.1 The Fashion System**

Kawamura (2005) describes fashion as an institutionalized system that evokes and allows continuous and ritualized change in garment and accessory design. It is argued that the fashion system involves organizations, institutions, producers, as well as events and practices, which all play an important role in contributing to the meaning of fashion. The functional perspective of the fashion system incorporates production, distribution, and consumption, all of which are interconnected. To mobilize the actors involved in the production and distribution of fashion, fashion shows are organized usually twice a year, i.e. Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. Showcasing new styles to buyers, journalists, and editors is one of the main purposes of these fashion shows, while an indirect effect is demonstrating that this mobilization is where fashion occurs, which in turn is adding value to the event. This attracts fashion actors to the city where fashion shows are held, thus maintaining the fashion culture as well as the city involved remains influential (Kawamura 2005).

Kawamura (2005) states that the location of fashion week reinforces the legitimacy of the location as a fashion city and its influence on fashion culture. Fashion cities, according to Breward and Gilbert (2006), are embedded in the promotion of cultural economy and the status can enable further growth of the cities. This means that there is an interconnection between fashion and the city, that can lead to competitive advantages on both parts. According to Capone and Lazzeretti (2016), the status of a fashion city enhances the attractiveness of a city, which can boost tourism and the economy. Moreover, as the image of the city improves, this can in turn have a positive effect on the fashion industry by improving sales and awareness of local fashion brands (Capone and Lazzeretti 2016).

Aspers (2010) refers to the fashion industry as a status market, where status hierarchies form a certain structure, ranging from the most to least prestigious actors. This is clearly common during fashion weeks, where those invited must have a certain role to gain access. In addition, the seating position at the fashion shows is determined by the perceived importance of the invitees. Fashion shows have become an exclusive but attention-grabbing spectacle where visually appealing and engaging fashion content is produced and disseminated via a number of media platforms reaching boundless amounts of consumers (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021).

## **3.2 The History of Fashion Week**

Fashion week is an event that brings together key people within the fashion industry, i.e. designers, buyers, journalists, models, influencers, and celebrities (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006). Soo Hoo (2015), in *Teen Vogue*, states that the event consists of designers showcasing upcoming collections in an environment of fashion shows and presentations. The fashion week phenomenon started to take form in the beginning of the 20th century, which came to play an important role in the growth of the modern fashion industry (Evans 2001), when Paris attempted to coordinate individual haute couture fashion shows into what is known as fashion week today (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021). Morton (n.d.) defines haute couture in a *Business of Fashion* article, as exclusive custom-made garments that require an incredible amount of technical craftsmanship. At this time, according to Pinchera and Rinallo (2021), the shows were very private and the guest list was highly selective in order to postpone imitation and keep it exclusive, inviting only a small number of clients, buyers, and press. Photographs and sketches were forbidden and the press had to follow strict directives of when it was allowed to publish articles about the displayed garments. The fashion shows in Paris attracted a wide international audience and the initiation of fashion week was planned to take place in the city. However, it was held off due to World War II and the first official fashion week was therefore held in New York in 1943. This event was initially called “Press Week” and allowed key people, who were unable to travel to Paris, to participate in the showcasing of upcoming collections by American fashion designers (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021).

The fashion scene went through essential changes between the 1950s and 1970s. Parisian couturiers declined, while street and youth culture began to emerge, putting Paris haute couture shows in crisis. The youth started to draw inspiration outside of the fashion industry, which paved the way for ready-to-wear clothing to enter fashion week. Paris was gradually challenged as a fashion empire by fashion weeks in New York, London, and Milan, due to the shift from haute couture to ready-to-wear. During this period of time, invited press increased in order to generate media coverage from fashion week, while excluding consumers became a method to gain media attention. Furthermore, during the time between the 1980s-2010, fashion investments started to increase, which was the starting point for the concept of branding. Fashion week became a promotional event with the aim to gain consumer awareness and build brand image. This turned fashion week into becoming an extravagant event, where the show settings evolved, i.e. lights, displays, music, and the choice of models (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021).

## **3.3 Fashion Week and Social Media**

Andersson and Jandér (2016) analyze how social media has been a key player in changing how fashion is presented during fashion week. It is shown that Instagram is a necessity for a brand to survive and that its culture has reinvented fashion week as an event for entertaining the public. Mondalek and Nanda (2021) state, in *Business of Fashion*, that the social media platform TikTok grew into a powerhouse during the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside new influencers who gained millions of followers on the platform overnight. Amed (2020) discusses that when restrictions were upheld during the pandemic, brands started to utilize TikTok to bring their collections to the consumers in the form of creative videos, as well as connect with the audience and gain engagement. Mondalek and Nanda (2021) argue that

TikTok brought creative streetwear to the public, which encouraged other social media platforms to increase their presence at fashion week in a way they had not previously done.

The digital attributes of fashion week have shifted the focus from the traditional way of selling a product, with press and retailers present at the shows, to directly reaching consumers, according to Sherman (2020) and Baskin (2022) in *Business of Fashion*. This has led to brands focusing on marketing activities through social media platforms and influencers to reach a wider audience, rather than putting on a show with a large crowd (Sherman 2020). This makes the event more consumer-oriented and is fixated on creating shows that attract attention on social media (Baskin 2022).

Influencers have become key guests to fashion week due to social media, allowing fashion week to be distributed to the public (Brodin Holmstedt 2017). Lou and Yuan (2019) state that social media influencers are considered experts in certain areas of their interests, e.g. in fashion. These social media users become influencers by creating compelling content regarding their lifestyle or area of interest and thereby gaining a following on their platform (Lou and Yuan 2019). Influencers have an audience that trusts them, and are thereby able to persuade their followers, which makes them essential in marketing (Barry 2014). Promotional content produced by an influencer is considered more authentic than if it had been produced by a brand (Lou and Yuan 2019). In addition, companies can achieve brand awareness and trustworthiness by collaborating with suitable influencers creating promotional content (Barry 2014).

Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) discuss the maintenance of hierarchies at fashion week, where the position of the invited fashion actors determines how they are treated, which is exemplified by how physical presence and front row seats have a higher position. This is also argued by Dunn (2018), stating that the traditional hierarchy is maintained in the digital space as well. Dunn (2018) investigated the Instagram activity from different actors involved during the Big Four's fashion weeks (New York, London, Paris, and Milan) in February 2017. It was shown that the brands' aim, of sharing content from the event, was to achieve a hierarchical stance to the public. Content shared on their platforms was carefully selected by the fashion brands, which was evident in the limited dissemination of information, visuals from the shows as well as the selection of the captured celebrities who were attending. Therefore, Dunn (2018) considers the role of the digital following as being similar to spectators standing outside a fashion show without an invitation, which only adds further value to the exclusivity that fashion weeks are embracing. This demonstrates that the role of the digital following is to create buzz around the already highly valued fashion event, resulting in the physical attendance remaining the highly prized place during fashion week (Dunn 2018), prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **3.4 Copenhagen - The Emerging Fashion Capital**

There is an expansion of fashion cities that use fashion for positioning purposes, challenging the long-dominated fashion capitals, i.e. the Big Four (Zhang et al. 2022). In *Vogue Scandinavia*, Borrelli-Persson (2022) states that Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, is a fashion city that in recent years has gained global attention, which is due to several developments, i.e. their sustainability focus and an evident "vibe shift" within their fashion

scene. Mohriñge (2021) argues in *L'officiel*, that Copenhagen is increasingly becoming a fashion capital due to its capability to differentiate from other fashion cities.

Copenhagen is currently considered an industry leader when it comes to its commitment to eco-friendly and responsible fashion. Van Syckle (2023), for the *New York Times*, discusses the requirements set by CPHFW for its AW 23 season. The participating brands are required to meet 18 sustainability standards in terms of materials, production, and business actions. This new self-governed standard by CPHFW is although not without risk, stated by Kent (2020) in *Business of Fashion*, as it means higher participation fees to compensate the emissions as well as the decision to filter out only compliant brands. Cecilie Thorsmark, the CEO of CPHFW, comments this as a: “need to set ambitious goals, but we also need to not set overwhelming targets that are impossible to reach [...] then we’ll lose the support of the industry, and then we’ll have absolutely no impact” (Kent 2020).

Borelli-Persson (2022) investigates the so-called “vibe shift”, by interviewing three experts in the field of fashion to understand their perspective on what has led Copenhagen to undergo a vibe shift within the fashion scene, especially noticeable during CPHFW Spring/Summer 2023 that took place in August 2022. The referred experts are Kasper Nielsen, founder of the Danish jewelry brand Hanrej, Simon Wick, co-founder of the Danish fashion brand Di(vision), and Cecilie Thorsmark, the CEO of CPHFW. When discussing what the vibe shift is all about, Nielsen and Thorsmark refers to the energy of a new generation that ventures into non-traditional paths and appears rebellious. This generation, according to Nielsen, has had an impact on the flourishing of the city, as they dared to separate themselves from the minimalism that Copenhagen was previously associated with, and experimented with expressing their personality. Wick believes that the vibe shift arose from “made-up cultures” within Copenhagen, that sets Copenhagen apart from the Big Four (Borrelli-Persson 2022). Street style is a concept that draws a lot of attention during fashion week, including CPHFW where their rebellious side is evident. Since fashion and the city are inevitably linked, fashion becomes an inherent role of a city’s urban life, with the city playing an essential part in mythologizing fashion (Berry 2020).

The Danish fashion aesthetic has long been known for its Scandi minimalism. Goedluck (2023), for *AnOther Magazine*, describes that it has gone from being all about the minimalist aesthetic, involving neutral colors and clean shapes, to then transforming into the “Ganni girl” aesthetic that allowed brave color combinations, to now evolving into a style being perceived as raw. The Danish fashion designers are starting to lean more towards an aesthetic of dark colors and unpolished rather rough looks. In the article by *AnOther Magazine*, Simon Wick mentions that the Danish people are not doing minimalistic fashion anymore and want to express themselves through their styles, which adds a rebellious aspect to it (Goedluck 2023).

## 4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consists of concepts, which have been selected based on their relevance to be applied to the collected material, and thus enable a better understanding of the results. The concepts form a tool for understanding the role of gatekeeping during fashion week, how the exclusivity of fashion week can be interpreted as well as the relationship between fashion week and buzz marketing. The concepts, together with the results, enable a rich analysis in order to provide answers to the research questions and ultimately fulfill the purpose of the study.

### 4.1 Gatekeeping

The concept of gatekeeping, according to Shoemaker and Vos (2009), is a process that focuses on narrowing down large amounts of information and making it accessible to people in their everyday life. The process has traditionally been seen as the core of mass-media and is both concerned with the selection of information, as well as the creation of messages that will be shared. Gatekeeping is a process that steers both what information to select and how to share it, which can in turn not only affect the social reality of the receiver of the information, but also shape opinions and attitudes. However, with the development of the internet, gatekeeping has evolved from being a one-way communication process between mass-media and the public, to an interactive communication process by enabling a two-way communication between the messenger and the receiver. Moreover, there has been a shift in how communication is spread to the public due to social media. The receiver, or audience, become gatekeepers themselves by sharing information they have received through the internet to others (Shoemaker and Vos 2009). Although Shoemaker and Vos (2009) provide an understanding of the significance of gatekeeping, the influence of the internet on gatekeeping is not the focus, which makes their research underdeveloped to suit the society of today.

Other researchers have thus further developed the concept of gatekeeping by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) by adding the influence of the internet. Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011) redefine the original concept of gatekeepers to online environments, arguing that digital platforms, i.e. social media platforms, have properties of immediacy, authenticity, and transparency, which alter the definition and role of a gatekeeper, as well as the flow and speed of information. Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011) suggest that there is a multidirectional flow of information rather than a two-way direction, as presented by Shoemaker and Vos (2009), meaning that all actors on digital platforms are possible gatekeepers. The digital platform itself does not operate as a technological gatekeeper, but functions as what the authors call a hub for information exchange, where organizations and individuals can influence and connect with each other by mediating the flow of information in different directions. Therefore, influencers can impact purchasing decisions of consumers and be used as an effective marketing tool by brands, making them important gatekeepers (Chin-Fook and Simmonds 2011).

As mentioned, the process of gatekeeping can shape one's social reality, as well as influence opinions and behavior (Shoemaker and Vos 2009). Fashion is about an illusion that is constantly in change. The creators of fashion are several influential actors within the fashion system, e.g. designers, marketers, and editors. These actors maintain an ideology about fashion by selecting and diffusing what is fashionable and not, making them gatekeepers of

fashion. The diffusion of this fashion knowledge has traditionally been done through traditional media such as fashion magazines and newspapers (Kawamura 2005). Furthermore, Rocamora (2017) elaborates on the way in which digital media has affected fashion shows and highlights a shift in the diffusion of fashion knowledge. This shift can be traced back to the fashion show of Dolce and Gabbana in September 2009, where fashion bloggers were invited to sit front row. The event went from having a strict invitation list to allowing the public to participate through social media, shaping the future of fashion shows (Rocamora 2017). In recent years, the key participants of fashion shows have become social media influencers, who have a strong presence online. Other key actors at fashion shows, such as designers, editors, and stylists have also been seen having an increasing presence online, spreading content related to the event through their social media platforms to the public. With the presence of social media influencers front row at fashion shows, there has been a change in status power leading to influencers taking on the role as gatekeepers instead of traditional media (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021).

## **4.2 Exclusivity**

The concept of exclusivity is a strategy for designers and brands to generate attention, distinction, and value (Hracs, Jakob, and Hauge 2013). Upshaw, Amyx, and Hardy (2017) state that products considered exclusive are seen as distinguished from competing products, which increase the customer's perceived value and can imply luxury or elevated social status. Hracs, Jakob, and Hauge (2013) discuss exclusivity through three identified mechanisms; to exploit consumer demand for uniqueness, involve and engage consumers to the production and promotion process, as well as manipulate the physical and digital space. The firstly mentioned mechanism involves creating unique goods rather than mass-produced, in order to create an external demand (Hracs, Jakob, and Hauge 2013). Gierl and Huettl (2010) argue that consumers buying unique considered products tend to signal their interpreted good taste which leads to receiving attention and admiration from others. On the other hand, if the product is limited due to high demand, i.e. a big number of people starting to adopt the product, it is no longer considered unique and purchasing the product does not contribute to the perception of exclusivity. However, what is considered more desirable in order to attain uniqueness and exclusivity, is to purchase products with limited supply, i.e. a scarce amount of manufactured products (Gierl and Huettl 2010).

The second mechanism, integrating consumers into the production or promotion process, is a way to generate exclusivity for specific products and create brand value. This can be achieved through co-creation activities, which Hracs, Jakob, and Hauge (2013) state is inducing brand loyalty as well. Co-creation activities can be carried out in different ways. For example, co-design is an activity within co-creation, which engages customers in the production process (Payne 2021), e.g. color or fabric selection (Wang, Shen and Liu 2017). Furthermore, Millspaugh and Kent (2016) discuss another aspect of co-creation, explained as a process involving presentation, interpretation and reaction, which is taking place when newly developed products are interacting with the fashion system, e.g. brands showcasing upcoming collections during fashion week. This leads to brands getting reactions and feedback from industry actors and consumers, which in turn is providing product development and contributes to future decision making. Another extension of co-creation is co-promotion, where customers participate in marketing a brand (Hracs, Jakob and Hauge 2013), e.g. by product recommendations online/offline or influencer collaborations. The final

mechanism is about manipulating the physical and digital space, by intentionally limiting the access to physical spaces, i.e. fashion events and parties, to achieve both social and cultural capital as well as scarcity (Hracs, Jakob and Hauge 2013). This is also argued by Currid (2007), who believes that fashion shows are central social settings for valuing the products as well as the invited audience.

In terms of fashion week and its aim to be an exclusive event, invitations and seating are well thought out issues. According to Skov et al. (2009), the participating fashion brands are highly selective with the guest list and exclude people that do not have the right positions or possess the right criterias for accessing the show. Still, it is of high importance that the venue is well attended. Skov et al. (2009) argue that absence of queues at the entry or empty seats at the show is a sign of failure, as well as it sets a poor tone for the hosted show. Furthermore, attending fashion week and being present at fashion shows has a crucial underlying aspect in the prestige of receiving an invitation, as it is a sign of access to the closed field of fashion (Findlay 2017). “There is no comparable prestige to accessing a show online” as Findlay (2017) says, meaning that the online access connotes fandom, i.e. being a follower rather than an insider. However, Findlay (2017) argues for the importance of attracting attention from both insiders and outsiders to achieve commercial aims, e.g. generate a large scale of publicity. Lastly, one of the challenges of maintaining exclusivity, argued by Mekonnen and Lerner (2018), is the adoption of digital integration and to maintain brand exclusivity rather than becoming just publicly present.

### **4.3 Buzz marketing**

Buzz marketing can be understood as a marketing activity that can be implemented with the aim of maximizing word of mouth (WOM) of a certain phenomenon or brand. Moreover, the process of WOM focuses on spreading information, which can influence behavior and attitudes of those who are reached. The way in which this can occur is through personal face-to-face conversations (WOM) or by sharing information through digital outlets and social media platforms (Mohr 2017), called electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Choi, Seo and Yoon 2017). The information spread by WOM is argued as reliable and trustworthy, as it is information from an independent source unrelated to brands or marketers (Notarantonio and Quigley 2009). Furthermore, WOM can be seen as an element in buzz marketing. However, WOM mainly focuses on the spreading of information and does not contribute to the understanding of why a phenomenon or brand becomes the center of attention. Hence, for buzz to occur, there is also a need for elements such as excitement, entertainment or something remarkably interesting about the information that is spread through WOM (Mohr 2017).

More in detail, Mohr (2017) suggests that there are three vital elements to take into consideration in terms of creating buzz successfully, including core value, viral marketing, and seeding strategy. The first mentioned element is about bringing out the brand’s core values in a marketing campaign to create an emotional connection with the audience. These core values can be related to a brand’s concept, products, or services that is of value to the consumers. It is of great importance to create efforts that are authentic to the brand and reflect the brand’s position on the market in order for it to go viral (Mohr 2017).

Viral marketing refers to marketing that occurs online with the purpose of creating buzz for brands (Mohr 2017). This marketing communication focuses on the creation of content for digital platforms. In order for marketers to achieve a successful viral marketing campaign, the content needs to not only stand out from other content presented online, but also connect with the audience for them to share the content with others (Ho and Dempsey 2010). Mohr (2017) proposes characteristics of viral content that a marketer should take into account when creating a viral marketing campaign, e.g. to evoke arousal, has a newsworthy hook, is a quickly consumed media format, is simple to share, generates value or works toward a goal when shared, and appeals to broad interests or topic areas. According to Stark (2018), the fashion shows that usually gain the most attention and media coverage during fashion week are those that surprise or shock the audience.

The last mentioned element is to select a seeding strategy (Mohr 2017), which means that marketers have to select an initial target audience that is considered influential and well-connected (Notarantonio and Quigley 2009). According to Mohr (2017), this cautiously selected target group are often influencers or celebrities that can generate credibility and have a large following on social media. Thus, they are able to influence their followers (Mohr 2017), create contagious dialogues, and spread content to a larger audience where a discussion continues (Notarantonio and Quigley 2009). Furthermore, Stark (2018) discusses the involvement of celebrities for marketing purposes on fashion week, also known as celebrity seeding. Either a contract is signed, the celebrity is seated front row at the show and wears the products of the hosted brand, or the celebrity is paid to be present at the show. Stark (2018) implies that a brand usually chooses to work with celebrities that are admired by its target audience, making the chosen celebrities appropriate brand ambassadors. The most valuable celebrities to work with during fashion week are those with a great media following, making their attendance a contributing factor for essential social media coverage and buzz generation, as they publish content from the show's front row on their social media platforms. The press tend to dedicate much of their time capturing celebrities' attendance at fashion week, by photographing them when arriving at fashion shows, when posing at brand boards, and chatting with other guests. From a brand perspective, the photos of a celebrity attending the show is considered as important as the photos from the runway (Stark 2018). Since the presence of influencers have increased at the front rows (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021), the concept of celebrity seeding can also be applied to influencers as their roles at fashion week are similar to each other.

## 5 Results

This chapter presents the results of the ethnographic and netnographic data collection. The results are divided into four sections, beginning with an overview of the CPHFW AW 23 set-up. Thereafter, the results on the digital and physical activities of the fashion shows and events during the fashion week are presented. Finally, social media and press coverage results are accounted for, focusing on the coverage of CPHFW on social media channels by actors such as CPHFW itself, brands, influencers, as well as magazines.

### 5.1 Copenhagen Fashion Week AW 23

Copenhagen Fashion Week AW 23 took place in central Copenhagen from 31st of January to 3rd of February 2023, with 28 participating fashion brands hosting fashion shows and showcasing their upcoming AW 23 collections. Additional events, trade shows, activities and talks were offered during CPHFW AW 23 alongside the fashion shows. The fashion shows and events were not only presented physically at CPHFW, but also digitally to the public through live streams on the social media platforms YouTube and Instagram, making it a phygital fashion week. Furthermore, the line-up consisted mainly of Danish brands, and only four foreign brands (Copenhagen Fashion Week 2022a). The recognition of Danish fashion and brands has grown immensely in popularity according to respondent Alina, a Brand Associate, who said: fashion week in Copenhagen has become a big and popular event. Compared to other fashion weeks, such as fashion week in Berlin, Alina stated: CPHFW is on another level this year and has attracted a big international audience, including many guests participating in shows and events.

### 5.2 Fashion Shows

While assuming the role of seaters during Fashion Show 1, an insider position was taken where observations from the show were conducted from the inside and thus enabled interactions with guests and employees. Prior to the show starting, guests were observed taking pictures outside the venue before entering. This included photos taken by the guests themselves with their phones, as well as photos taken by media standing outside the venue. Backdrops with the brand name were placed outside the venue with the purpose of guests taking photos with it. Moreover, influencers were walking up and down in front of the entrance to take photos, which was observed as a normal situation by the staff, yet stressful as discussions about a possible delay of the show started to spread among the staff. Furthermore, once the guests entered the venue, they were greeted and assisted by the Global PR manager as well as additional seaters to find their seats for the show. While guests were being seated, one of them expressed that Copenhagen Fashion Week has evolved and was surprised by the shows, as they felt “next level”. Furthermore, a brand employee conveyed information from higher management, that the people sitting in a certain section of the front row should be welcomed exceptionally well as they were considered important people. Guests were observed taking photos inside the venue, posing by the runway prior to the show and once the show started almost every guest was sitting with their phones. They were either taking photos or filming, and at times even looking down at their phones without paying attention to the

show for short amounts of time. After the show, guests taking photos and networking continued both inside and outside the venue.

When approaching the venue of Fashion Show 2, a dialogue with Bettina, a Street Style Photographer, was conducted, who said: “I believe that there has been a shift after the pandemic since almost every fashion show is full now”, considering CPHFW had gotten bigger. Moreover, a long queue of guests waiting to enter the building with several brand employees gatekeeping could be observed from afar. When joining the long queue, it could be observed that the atmosphere was close to chaotic, with the employees being stressed, VIP guests being dropped off by taxis in front of the entrance, and multiple photographers capturing the happening. Guests with more extravagant styles were seen positioned outside the entrance to be photographed, walking back and forth to get the perfect shot. Photographers were also standing along the queue of guests waiting to be let in, to capture street styles while guests were interacting with each other in the queue. The brand employees could be observed asking for invites by the guests, and without an invitation to the show, we were positioned to the side of the entrance to wait for possible seats available. In a group, with around fifteen others, we were waiting for available seats. Positive attitudes to get seats were received from the gatekeepers until the doors suddenly closed without any information. Merely seconds later, the music from inside the venue started to play and the show had started. Confusion and disappointment could be observed among the group, as some nervously laughed and shook their heads. Thereafter, the group began to leave the location.

In terms of the digital fashion shows, it was observed that the majority of the YouTube live streams did not get more than 100 viewers when they were live. The viewers were only highlighted in numbers, giving anonymity to the viewers and thus not allowing information about the people attending the online shows. However, the live stream videos have received significantly more views afterwards, with Ganni currently having over 1 million views (Ganni 2023).

Clara, Global Relations Manager, said: “digital shows were not a thing during fashion week before the pandemic, but that changed during the pandemic as we were not allowed to host physical shows because of the Covid-19 restrictions and had to move to fully digital solutions”. She addressed that their first digital show was a live stream on Instagram that was produced in-house, and called it: “a very simple production”. Dorthea, Social Media Coordinator, mentioned that they did not get as much attention on the digital show as they do when they arrange physical ones. She continued: “we have reached a lot more people on social media when we have had the physical shows, as influencers and media are more likely to share when they are attending physically”. Moreover, Eline, Marketing Manager, stated:

“You are able to be very creative in the way of telling the story and building the channels surrounding the digital show, but at the same time, it is harder to capture and hold the attention of the consumer. You are quickly just one of many brands, so I also believe this is where the focus on the wow element came in, for example spraying a dress onto a model, celebrities walking shows, or other surprising elements. Everyone wants to create the new viral moment to make sure we stand out digitally”.

Clara explained that the digital shows have increased after the pandemic and for this year’s fashion week, the brand has hired a professional team to produce the live stream in addition to the physical show. Dorthea added: “nowadays it is a requirement from CPHFW to live stream the shows on YouTube, which I believe is a great way to make fashion more

accessible to everyone”. Regarding the physical attendance after the implementation of live streams of fashion shows, Clara said: “I don’t believe that fewer people attend the physical shows because of the digital shows, instead the attendance is about the same as prior to the pandemic”. Clara believed that the digital audience consists of those who are interested in fashion or people who work in the fashion industry and are not invited to the shows. Clara continued: “the digital shows have resulted in reducing the high level of exclusivity that used to exist when the guests of the fashion shows were strictly selected whether they were invited or not”.

### **5.3 Events**

An After Party was hosted by one of the participating brands. The event was listed as a part of the official schedule on the website of CPHFW and it was clearly stated as an event for invitees only. Outside the venue, two queues could be observed. Interactions with guests in the queues indicated that one was for invited guests and the other for uninvited guests. The queue for invited guests moved quickly, as the security guard let most of the guests in after standing in the queue for approximately ten minutes. On the other hand, the queue for uninvited guests moved slowly, letting only a few guests enter over a period of one hour. Differences between the two queues could be observed, in terms of style of clothing. The uninvited guests wore current trends from what appeared to be commercial, accessible in fast fashion stores, demonstrating no interest and knowledge in fashion, which is not in line with the expectations of a guest participating in an event during fashion week. While, the invited wore well-chosen outfits that seemed ahead of their time, e.g. garments from upcoming collections or styles that have not yet been adopted by fast fashion brands. However, it could be observed that people from both queues were let into the party. After standing in the uninvited queue for about an hour and a half, we switched to the invited queue and were able to enter within only a few minutes without an invitation. Inside, a large crowd could be observed, including a mix of industry people such as influencers, models, and brand employees, as well as outsiders. It could be observed that the venue was extremely crowded.

This season of CPHFW also featured events by emerging designers or brands that did not host a fashion show, allowing showcasing upcoming collections in other settings. One of them took place in a small hidden venue, located 10 minutes by metro from the central station. When arriving at the venue of the Fashion Event, only the designer was present and no other visitors could be observed. After a while, one visitor arrived but only stayed for a few minutes. The collection was hung on hangers and dressed on mannequins, while a campaign video was shown on a screen. The Fashion Event was promoted on CPHFW’s website as well as featured in *British Vogue* and *Vogue Scandinavia*, urging people to look out for this upcoming brand during CPHFW AW 23 (Chan 2023a; Shiffman 2023a), while *ELLE UK* reports from CPHFW and names the brand as one of the three hottest upcoming brands (ELLE 2023).

From observations online, the Zalando Sustainability Award was the event that received the most attention and coverage on social media and in the press. The event is a partnership between CPHFW and Zalando, celebrating brands that are driving positive change with responsible actions in the industry. The brands are selected by a panel of judges based on how they improve their impact, source of materials and their manufacturing methods, in which the winner receives a partnership with Zalando for the production of an exclusive capsule

collection as well as 20,000 euros (Zalando 2022). The finalists for the AW 23 season were TG Botanical, Selam Fassahaye, and STAMM, which all showcased their collections during CPHFW. At the end of the week, it was announced that STAMM had won the Zalando Sustainability Award this season, due to its impressive craftsmanship and execution of sustainability actions (Copenhagen Fashion Week 2023a). The event was streamed on CPHFW's Youtube page, both the fashion shows as well as the winner announcement, allowing access to the public. The event received a lot of media attention, where both the winner, STAMM, and the initiators, CPHFW and Zalando, got mentioned in a number of magazines, e.g. Fashion Network US and Numero Mag NL (Halliday 2023; Mota 2023).

There were several other sustainability events held by CPHFW in addition to the Zalando Sustainability Award. "Small Talks - Big Conversations", a talk series on YouTube where issues facing fashion are discussed by industry actors, was continuously held this season of CPHFW and live streamed to the public on YouTube (Copenhagen Fashion Week 2022b). Another sustainability event, called "Roundtable", was held in partnership with Business of Fashion, which included industry leaders discussing how the fashion industry and its efforts can be accelerated in order to become more sustainable (Copenhagen Fashion Week 2023b). This was a closed event and was only reported on in a Business of Fashion article after the event was held (Bof Studio 2023).

## **5.4 Social Media and Press Coverage**

This chapter consists of collected material from social media platforms and is presented from the respective role of the involved actors. In addition, global press coverage of CPHFW is presented, considering both magazines that were physically present during fashion week as well as external magazines that did not participate physically.

### **5.4.1 Copenhagen Fashion Week**

On the official TikTok account of CPHFW, it was observed that a partnership occurred with three influencers. Moreover, it could be seen that the collaboration was promoted on the influencers' personal social media platforms, as well as on CPHFW's website and Instagram story. The partnership included influencers hosting CPHFW's TikTok account. The influencers were Victoria Sharp (@victoriasharp\_), Osama al Nasar (@osama.alnaser) and Samuel Lejon (@modelejon). They created content for CPHFW's TikTok account solely during fashion week, which mainly included four different types of content; get ready with me (GRWM), behind the scenes, front row, and mini vlogs from CPHFW. Some of these videos featured a presentation of clothes, lended out or gifted by brands, as well as the influencer being in a sponsored hotel. Other posts included models getting glammed backstage and interviews with influencers describing their thoughts of a show. As for front row content of various runway looks, one in particular received the most attention, which was the catwalk appearance of former Real Housewives of Beverly Hills cast member Lisa Rinna. Other happenings covered in these posts included documentation from CPHFW's opening ceremony, Zalando's opening party, and a breakfast event hosted by Marimekko.

In addition to content posted from the collaborations with the influencers, it could be observed that the Tiktok account of CPHFW also posted two different types of street style

content. One includes compiled clips of people's outfits as they walk around Copenhagen during fashion week, often accompanied by a headline such as "What people are wearing today, Copenhagen". One of these types of posts stands out in the amount of attention it has gained, compared to the account's other posts. It has received 2.1M views, 349K likes, 1041 comments and 15.4K shares (14th April 2023), which is around three times more views, likes, and comments than they usually receive on their posts (Copenhagen Fashion Week 2023c). The other type of street style content is brief interviews with guests attending the shows. The interviewed guests answer the question of what their favorite piece is in their outfit and further state its brand.

On the Instagram account of CPHFW, content including promoting brands, backstage footage of the participating brands, front row coverage of the fashion shows, and street style coverage showing off looks captured by the official street style photographer was observed. The Instagram reel attracting the most attention on the account was a post with front-row content of the brand Di(vision)'s fashion show. It received up to 138K views (14th April 2023), which is almost 70K more views than the second most viewed reel that CPHFW posted during AW 23 (Copenhagen Fashion Week 2023d). Moreover, it was observed that the Instagram account also shared features and articles of the events that had been covered in magazines, such as Vogue, the New York Times, and Business of Fashion with topics ranging from sustainability to vibe-shift.

#### **5.4.2 Brands**

The days leading up to the fashion shows, it could be observed that the brands participating in CPHFW began promoting the live streams of their physical fashion show on their social media channels. The promotion of the live stream included information about which platforms the show will be streamed on, as well as the time and day. Prior to the shows, some brands also posted content showing behind the scenes footage of preparations for the show. During the shows, it could be seen that the main content produced and shared by the brands was the live stream. After the shows, it was observed that the brands began to post content on their social media channels. This included images and short videos taken during the fashion shows, with a focus of showing the pieces from the catwalk. It also included behind the scenes from the fashion show, showing their followers preparations of the venue, looks, and models. Furthermore, several collaborations could be observed, where brands advertised their collections on social media by featuring influencers who were attending their shows and wore outfits from the brands. This included content from outside the venue, after parties, or street style images. Moreover, brands were not only seen collaborating with influencers during fashion week, but also with other brands, magazines, and organizations.

Among the participating brands, two brands managed to draw major attention to their fashion shows on social media and in the press, Di(vision) and Rotate. On the official Instagram page of Di(vision), the brand posted short clips of their AW 23 fashion show "Dressed for Disaster", including a post of their final piece captioned: "What are you bringing to the table? [...] I am the table". The same post was posted on their TikTok account captioned "This is how we ended our show last night called "Dressed for Disaster". It was an unexpected moment for all of our show guests!". From the posts, it could be observed that the runway was situated in a dining area, with guests seated at dinner tables and models casually walking in between the tables. The post showed one of the models, sitting by a table as an invited guest, who suddenly tapped the glass as if she was about to make a speech. She placed herself

in front of the table, facing the other guests and showed off her outfit. She started to walk and dragged the entire tablecloth with her, which turned out to be a part of the outfit. A reaction of shock and excitement was seen among the audience, as they clapped their hands and gasped. Around a week after the show, the post had over 4M views on TikTok (Division 2023a) and 137K likes on Instagram (Division 2023b). The brand has previously received a maximum of 84K views on TikTok (Division 2023a), and between 2K to 3K likes on their posts on Instagram (Division 2023b).

Rotate introduced a celebrity surprise appearance on its runway show, which sparked a lot of attention for the brand. Halfway into the show, Lisa Rinna took place on the catwalk, dressed in a thin strapped black bodysuit and oversized leo-printed faux fur coat. She confidently strutted down the catwalk among screams and loud cheers. The appearance was shared on Rotate's official Instagram and TikTok accounts, as well as on the social media accounts of Lisa Rinna, and guests attending the physical show. This also grabbed the attention of international media and could be observed in published articles on fashion magazines from France to Canada (Marain 2023; Eleuterio 2023).

### **5.4.3 Influencers**

CPHFW's collaboration with the three TikTok influencers led to these influencers being featured in magazines, e.g. Teen Vogue and British Vogue as well as receiving publicity on social media (Delgado 2023; Vogue 2023). It could be observed that two out of these three influencers got a follower increase on their Instagram platforms in February 2023, when the collaboration with CPHFW took place.

In addition to the four influencers who collaborated with CPHFW, many other international influencers were present during the week, working with both participating brands that hosted fashion shows as well as other brands. Collaborations could be observed by influencers posting content on their social media platforms, i.e. Instagram and Tiktok, including content from attending fashion shows, front row, dressing in the respective brand's products, GRWM and, "follow me around" videos. This was further observed by the posts' captions, indicating that collaborations were taking place. In conjunction with influencers being invited and attending fashion shows, they were featured in street style articles from the week, e.g. in Vogue Scandinavia, ELLE, and Harper's Bazaar, gaining media attention (Forsberg 2023; Stern and Attia 2023; Davis 2023). Furthermore, several influencers were seen on a number of runways during CPHFW, which was observed by influencers being featured in different fashion magazines online and on social media.

### **5.4.4 Magazines**

Several magazines were invited to CPHFW to document the week, which is a mutual partnership for both parts. It provides publicity and media coverage for CPHFW and everyone involved, while the magazines benefit from being the first to gain access to the main fashion scene and can deliver exclusive articles to their eager audience about what is seen on the runways and streets of fashion week.

Magazines from several countries were observed present during the fashion week, posting various content from the different fashion shows and events, e.g. Cosmopolitan DE, ELLE Sverige, ELLE Norge, ELLE DK, ELLE België, ELLE NL, Vogue US, Vogue NL, Vogue Scandinavia, Business of Fashion, and The Cut. In addition to the magazines that had a physical presence during the fashion week, a number of international magazines have been observed reporting about CPHFW, such as New York Times, Vogue France, Wallpaper Magazine UK, AnOther Magazine UK, Hypebeast HK, and ELLE Korea among others (Penny 2023; Vogue France 2023, Conlon 2023; Goedluck 2023; Sacal 2023a; Myeongmin 2023). It could be observed that this season of CPHFW has been covered in media internationally, with the majority of the magazines highlighting reporting on the Danish fashion scene as well as happenings, i.e. Lisa Rinna's performance at Rotate and (Di)vision's tablecloth outfit. It could be observed that these two happenings have received the most media attention, often mentioned as the main happenings of CPHFW AW 23.

Furthermore, other topics of CPHFW that have been observed to be discussed by magazines are trend spotting, best runway looks, street style, emerging brands, CPHFW's sustainability actions, and the so-called vibe shift. International magazines from HongKong, Netherlands, and Australia i.e. Hypebae HK, FashionUnited NL, and InStyle AU offered their readers trend spotting from the CPHFW runways, where most participating brands were mentioned (Kim 2023; Mountford 2023; Avery 2023). The Italian NSS Magazine confirmed CPHFW as: "the place to be" in the fashion system and made a list of the best looks of the week, including brands such as Aeron, Holzweiler, Ganni, P.L.N and Wood Wood (Martino 2023). The street style of CPHFW was commonly noticed in several magazines, e.g. Teen Vogue US and Harper's Bazaar NL among others, where plenty of high quality photos from the streets of Copenhagen were offered, capturing designers, influencers and other fashion actors (Delgado 2023; Liesavage 2023). Some emerging participating brands were highlighted by the press, one of which was Latimmier. The brand was mentioned by Hypebeast HK and Vogue Scandinavia due to its recycled craftsmanship and redefinition of modern fashion (Socal 2023b; Shiffman 2023b).

It has been observed that CPHFW's environmental responsibility and sustainability measures have been widely discussed in the media. Le Monde published an article about the sustainability requirements CPHFW placed on participating brands, discussing them in an impressive tone, and concluded with writing that Paris should take note of the Danish initiatives and apply similar standards to its fashion week (Von Bardeleben 2023). Lastly, the perceived vibe shift that has taken place in the Danish fashion scene, previously discussed by Borrelli-Persson (2022) for Vogue US, was observed being put into words by AnOther Magazine UK after this season of CPHFW (Goedluck 2023). Lastly, the AW 23 season of CPHFW has been observed to receive a lot of attention in the media and articles have been written in a positive sense, drawing attention to the Danish fashion culture and Copenhagen as a fashion city.

## **6 Discussion**

In this chapter, the results will be analyzed through the presented conceptual frameworks gatekeeping, exclusivity, and buzz marketing. The analysis is divided into two parts, the first part with the focal point of answering RQ 1: What elements of Copenhagen Fashion Week contribute to Copenhagen emerging as a fashion capital and what impact do they have on marketing? and the second part to answer RQ 2: How does the combination of an on-site and digital approach of Copenhagen Fashion Week affect marketing communication? Moreover, the presented literature review will be addressed in relation to the results and concepts, to contribute to a deeper understanding and discussion of the research questions.

### **6.1 Copenhagen - The Emerging Fashion Capital**

The first part of the analysis is highlighting elements contributing to Copenhagen emerging as a fashion capital in recent years. This is discussed in regards to sustainability, vibe shift, and street style as well as the effects these elements have on marketing. Hence, RQ1 is answered in the following sections.

#### **6.1.1 Copenhagen Fashion Week and Sustainability**

The implementation of the 18 minimum standards and the focus on sustainability on CPHFW was highly covered in different media outlets. Buzz can be created around a certain phenomenon by maximizing eWOM (Choi, Seo and Yoon 2017). In regards to the media coverage on the implemented sustainability standards, various magazines, such as Le Monde drew attention to the requirements in the sense that Paris, one of the main fashion capitals, should take note and apply similar standards (Von Bardeleben 2023), and Vogue Scandinavia named CPHFW as the industry leader in terms of their commitment to sustainability (Borrelli-Persson 2022). This publicity has contributed to buzz around the sustainability standards and overall focus on sustainability of CPHFW.

Moreover, the narrative of Scandinavia being a front figure of sustainability in the fashion industry, could be argued to have strengthened the trustworthiness of the shared information in the media. This together with sustainability, being perceived as one of the core values of CPHFW through the sustainability standards, could be another possible reason for the sustainability focus of CPHFW receiving remarkable attention. The core values of a brand or phenomenon according to Mohr (2017), creates emotional connection with the audience and makes the information that is shared valuable as well as authentic and are important aspects in creating buzz. The creation of buzz around sustainability, can on one hand be perceived as positive as it raises awareness around the issues of the fashion industry. On the other hand, it raises some concerns in terms of the risk of actors using sustainability simply as a marketing tool, thus engaging in greenwashing.

Furthermore, the nature of independent sources is to be considered, as many independent actors can still be highly interconnected with fashion week. For example, Vogue Scandinavia is dependent on a fashion industry in Scandinavia that is relevant to the outside world, making it questionable whether or not their articles are written from a critical perspective.

This raises additional questions about how independent the media actually is in relation to fashion week and thus the credibility of these sources.

CPHFW did not only implement these sustainability standards, but also hosted sustainability events. One event that gained attention in the media and generated buzz was the Zalando Sustainability Award. The event was mentioned in a number of different international magazines i.e. Fashion Network FR and Numéro Mag FR. In this way, similar to the sustainability standards, the event maximized eWOM through independent sources. In addition to this, the event also had elements of surprise and excitement related to it being a contest, which according to Mohr (2017) are components that can generate buzz.

Other sustainability events held by CPHFW, i.e. “Small Talks - Big Conversations” and “Roundtable” did not spark the same media attention as the Zalando Sustainability Awards. According to Mohr (2017), what makes a phenomenon gain attention and for buzz to occur, there needs to be something exciting and captivating about it. This was the case both in regards to the sustainability standards, as it proposed a certain uniqueness and innovativeness that had not been seen before at fashion weeks, as well as the excitement of Zalando Sustainability Awards. However, the two other events did not provide the same excitement, instead they were more educational, which could perhaps be the reason for it to not have generated as much buzz as the other events.

Although the Zalando event raises awareness and encourages more sustainable actions by participating brands, the choice of collaborating with Zalando for the Sustainability Award could be criticized in terms of credibility. This is due to Zalando receiving the “Green Washing Award” by the Norwegian Consumer Council in 2022 (Tobiasson 2022). The event would have generated greater credibility if it had been a partnership with e.g. a non-profit organization or an independent standard-setting organization that is known for working with sustainability in the fashion industry. Although, that might not have had the same effect in terms of generating buzz.

Worth mentioning is that the CPHFW self-governed sustainability standards involve risks (Kent 2020), which shows CPHFW taking a stance requiring courage, meanwhile it demonstrates an industry awareness and responsibility action. As Thorsmark mentions, the CEO of CPHFW, there is a need to keep reachable targets that do not feel too overwhelming, as that would only result in reduced industry support and zero contribution (Kent 2020). This sustainability initiative, which has proven successful for CPHFW, has required a lot of work and risk management. It is no coincidence that Copenhagen has become a unique industry leader and put its name on the global fashion market. The sustainability standards and the related events have resulted in a competitive advantage for CPHFW by differentiating itself from others. Moreover, these initiatives have also served marketing purposes. CPHFW has actively promoted its sustainability commitments on its website and social media platforms, which has provided external awareness and in turn led to press coverage and eWOM regarding CPHFW being a sustainability focused event.

### **6.1.2 Scandinavian Fashion, Vibe Shift, and Street Style**

The apparent change in Copenhagen’s atmosphere and its emergence as a fashion capital is not due to one cause, but rather multiple developments during recent years. In addition to the sustainability focus of CPHFW, one reason could be the opportunity for Copenhagen to

become the representative of Scandinavian fashion. Stockholm and Copenhagen have, according to Borrelli-Persson (2022) formed “a sort of yin and yang of Nordic design”. Due to Stockholm’s conventional Fashion Week being canceled in 2019, it could be argued that Copenhagen was able to grow into the Scandinavian fashion capital as all focus is shifted towards CPHFW. Another reason could be that the vibe shift, experienced in 2022, has drawn attention to the Danish fashion scene (Borrelli-Persson 2022), which brings curiosity to Copenhagen, CPHFW, and its street style. This is noted by Alina, expressing the immense growth of Danish fashion and CPHFW becoming an internationally popular event. As stated by Kasper Nielsin, the founder of a Danish jewelry brand, Copenhagen dared to separate themselves from the previously associated minimalism and experimented with expressing their personality (Borrelli-Persson 2022). One could argue that Copenhagen set itself apart from Stockholm and the previously considered Scandi look, by moving from minimalism to something more expressive, which was perhaps seen as more interesting and proposed novelty. It could be argued that Copenhagen was ahead of Stockholm when it came to identifying contemporary fashion, which takes on a more rebellious expression, and therefore became the fashion capital of Scandinavia.

Furthermore, there is a connection between the city and fashion where the status of fashion increases the attractiveness of the city. At the same time, as the perception of the city improves, its fashion industry generates both revenue and awareness (Capone and Lazzeretti 2016). The results from observing activities on-site indicate that fashion in Copenhagen holds a certain kind of status. Influencers and celebrities were eager to be seen as well as document their presence and looks and photographers were keen on taking their pictures. These actors were seen creating content for social media and press prior, during, and after the shows. Producing digital content on site was clearly a huge part of fashion week and the desire to display one’s attendance at CPHFW indicates that the fashion week possesses status.

Produced content such as street style is a big part of what generates buzz in the city. Street style content is what receives the most attention on CPHFW’s TikTok account, as one of their posts received 2.1M views and thus went viral. Ho and Dempsey (2010) argue that an important component for content to go viral, is that it must stand out so that the audience is encouraged to share it. Copenhagen street style is talked about as an element that flourishes the city with its rebellious and distinctive style (Borrelli-Persson 2022). Thus, making it stand out and is interesting for the audience to share. Mohr (2017) states that viral content can be used as a tool to create buzz for brands, while in this case CPHFW used viral street style content as a tool to create buzz for the city. The guests capturing these moments were influencers and celebrities that are considered influential and have a large following on social media, which according to Mohr (2017) is one of the main components in creating buzz of a phenomenon. As Notarantonio and Quigley (2009) state, they can influence their followers, and thereby create contagious dialogues that spread to larger audiences where a discussion continues. Numerous people were thereby able to gain insights on what was going on in Copenhagen. Outstanding street style content and glamorous front row content that is spread across multiple social media platforms, reaching innumerable consumers, is what Aspers (2010) means enables the happening to become highly iconic and a spectacle across a city. Invited guests, who seem to share the responsibility of creating the city’s buzz, were cautiously selected by the brands participating at CPHFW, which according to Mohr (2017) is a strategy to create buzz. This means that brands have an indirect impact on the creation of the evident buzz.

In parallel with the growing popularity of the Copenhagen fashion scene, the desire to participate in CPHFW has increased, affecting the exclusivity of the event. Gierl and Huettl (2010) discuss product exclusivity due to supply constraints, which in this case can be linked to the limitation of physical availability of CPHFW. The eagerness to access the event combined with the limitation is contributing to CPHFW becoming an exclusive event. This leads to an evident prestige that comes with an invitation, as Findlay (2017) explains, giving invitees insider status as well as receiving attention from the outside (Gierl and Huettl 2010).

According to Kawamura (2005), the location of fashion week attracts fashion actors, resulting in the city's fashion culture remaining influential and reinforcing its legitimacy as a fashion city. This was evident at CPHFW, with international actors gathering for fashion shows and events. The legitimization of Copenhagen as a fashion city also enhances the attractiveness of the city, which in turn boosts tourism and the economy. As the city achieves global popularity, it improves the image of the city as well as it strengthens the local fashion brands (Capone and Lazzarotti 2016). However, in recent years, Copenhagen has not only legitimized itself as a fashion city, but has also been widely discussed as an emerging fashion capital, due to its ability to differentiate itself. It could be argued that there are several elements of CPHFW that contribute to the positioning and higher status of the city within the fashion industry.

In summary, the first element of CPHFW that contributes to Copenhagen as an emerging fashion capital is the positioning of CPHFW as a front figure in sustainability. The second element of CPHFW that contributes to this is CPHFW becoming the only fashion week in Scandinavia, making Copenhagen the main representative of Scandinavian fashion. The third contributing element is the distinguished vibe that is emphasized during CPHFW and presented through its street style. These elements have generated awareness of CPHFW and enabled a differentiation of Copenhagen from other fashion cities.

## **6.2 A Phygital Fashion Week**

The second part consists of an analysis of how the on-site and digital settings of fashion week relate to each other and how the combination of the approaches affect marketing communication. Discussions on how gatekeeping and exclusivity take place on-site as well as digitally are accounted for, different insider roles are identified and their respective impact on marketing, as well as the value of the front row and the hierarchies that follow. Hence, RQ2 is answered in the following sections.

### **6.2.1 Awareness and Exclusivity**

One of the main purposes of fashion week is to showcase upcoming fashion collections and generate publicity for brands (Kawamura 2005). To achieve this purpose, those with access to the fashion shows need to share information with outsiders, in other words, take the role of gatekeepers of fashion. Rocamora (2017) highlights how the digital media has shifted the diffusion of fashion knowledge in the sense that influencers present at fashion shows enable the public to participate through social media. This makes influencers take on the role of gatekeepers in fashion, instead of traditional media (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021). The role of influencers as gatekeepers could be observed both through the on-site and online

observations. During CPHFW, influencers were seated front row at fashion shows, sharing content to their followers on social media. The sharing of content from the physical fashion shows is a way for brands to be promoted beyond their existing customer base and thus leads to greater exposure of a brand. Furthermore, gatekeeping can shape opinions and attitudes of the receiver of the information (Shoemaker and Vos 2009) and according to Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011), influencers are thus an effective marketing tool for brands as they can influence the purchasing decisions of consumers through their digital platforms. This makes influencers present at the fashion shows during CPHFW a highly important marketing strategy for brands, as they are considered the current gatekeepers of fashion and highly influential in generating attention.

Gatekeepers of fashion, have according to Kawamura (2005), traditionally been actors within the fashion industry, providing information to the public that the public otherwise would not access. The physical fashion shows have upheld a strict invitees-only policy, making the role of gatekeepers important. However, the digital show has enabled the public to gain direct access to information that traditionally would have been considered insider information. Thus, eliminating the role of gatekeepers as a marketing tool on digital shows. To be considered, Kawamura's (2005) point of view was written before the development of social media, which came to change the concept of gatekeeping within the fashion industry and thus needs an update of its role in relation to social media. As gatekeeping can not be utilized as a marketing tool to generate awareness on digital shows, brands need to adapt their approach to their online shows. The digital shows and the adaption is discussed by Eline, highlighting the need for wow elements online, which is in line with the discussion by Baskin (2022) and Sherman (2020) who state that fashion shows have become focused on attracting attention of consumers on social media. Eline added: "everyone wants to create the new viral moment to make sure we stand out digitally", which indicates a shift in brands' focus from providing an on-site fashion show for physical guests, to creating a show that contains elements that evoke arousal and thus attracting the digital consumers. One could argue that the show is staged to take place in the digital realm. According to Dorthea, the show gets much more attention when it is arranged physically than when it is held digitally only. She further stated: "we have reached a lot more people on social media when we have had the physical shows, as influencers and media are more likely to share when they are attending physically", which indicates a value of the physical space.

The need to stand out due to the difficulty of reaching consumers' attention, means that brands are putting in greater efforts to create viral moments in order to gain awareness. As the digital fashion shows are live streams from the physical shows, the efforts to gain awareness online is also enhancing the physical show. However, creating viral moments that are constructed to generate buzz has been questioned within the industry. In an article for Business of Fashion, Williams (2023) highlights the discussion about whether the role of viral moments might be subsiding. In the article, Claire Gallon, a consultant for luxury brands is cited, expressing that: "right now it may make sense to invest in hyper-visibility, but as brands look ahead they're thinking about whether it works to constantly surprise, or whether this is actually leading to a banalisation of brand awareness" (Williams 2023). This concern regarding banalisation of brand awareness starts questioning the authenticity, which is also expressed by the industry actor Youssef Marquis, who says: "It can be a fatal attraction, though, because then how do you live up to it?" (Williams 2023).

In order to maintain or achieve a certain level of exclusivity, a manipulation of physical and digital space by intentionally limiting the access to physical spaces can be done to achieve

social and cultural capital as well as scarcity, discussed by Hracs, Jakob, and Hauge (2013). This is a possible strategy in an on-site and digital setting of fashion week, which was experienced during CPHFW. Outside the venue of Fashion Show 2, we were told to kindly step aside to soon be able to enter the show, where suddenly the doors were closed in front of us, with no explanation as to why we could not enter. The brand employees outside the venue intentionally sounded compliant and positive so that we, along with about 15 other people, waited patiently at the entrance, hoping to soon enter the venue. Findlay (2017) discusses a similar scenario from a brand perspective, arguing that it is important to attract attention of both insiders and outsiders in order to achieve commercial goals. It can therefore be argued that this is what the brand behind Fashion Show 2 did. They encouraged us to stay, in order to achieve an outsider demand of accessing the show to gain additional exclusivity towards the brand as well as the show. Furthermore, the absence of queues at the entrance is usually a sign of failure and may set a poor tone for the show (Skov et al. 2009), which could be another reason for the employees' behavior.

Moreover, digital availability leads to a level of democratization of fashion week, as it opens a previously closed and private event to the public. According to Pinchera and Rinallo (2021), the historically highly selective guest list maintained a certain exclusivity. The question is, is fashion week's exclusivity affected by democratization through digital activities? Clara believed that the exclusivity has decreased as a result of the digital access, as fashion week is no longer just for invited guests, but for a digital audience as well. On the other hand, Clara mentioned that the audience of the digital shows are separate from those who are invited to the physical shows, indicating that the exclusivity might be maintained at the physical shows as it is still dependent on a selective guest list. As Findlay (2017) puts it, "there is no comparable prestige to accessing a show online". This can be applied to why we, along with a group of others, were eager to access the physical show, even though the option to stream it online was available all along. It is clear that the physical space of fashion week is still perceived as the most exclusive one, as argued by Dunn (2018). Findlay (2017) considers the online access as expressed fandom in the sense of being a follower rather than an insider. This suggests that the exclusivity of fashion week has not diminished, as the demand for physical participation is still high, even though it takes place in an environment where both an on-site and a digital setting of fashion week is offered.

Furthermore, the exclusivity within the observed After Party and Fashion Event was perceived differently than the shows. Before we reached the After Party, we were aware of the invitees-only policy as informed on CPHFW's website. When we got to the location of the party, we observed two different queues, one for the invited and one for the uninvited. We were surprised by the fact that an uninvited queue was apparent due to previous information on the website, which questions the expected level of exclusivity. The people in the invited queue were dressed as they had a fashion interest, while a fashion interest within the uninvited queue was not as clear, contributing to a demand to participate among different types of people and not only those interested in fashion. We noticed people in the uninvited queue were let in one by one, but at an incredibly slow pace. After waiting for about an hour in the uninvited queue, we took a stand in the invited one and got in in just a few minutes without anyone asking if we had an invite. When entering the extremely packed party, including all types of people regardless of connection to fashion week or not, indicating that there was no exclusivity inside. The crowdedness outside the venue contributed to a feeling of exclusivity. However, Skov et al. (2009) mean that the purpose of a selective guest list is to achieve exclusivity and the exclusivity inside was absent since the guest list had no meaning. CPHFW succeeds in digitally presenting an exclusivity with the statement of invitees-only on

their website, but due to the guest list not fulfilling a function, the exclusivity was not maintained on-site.

Warkander (2014) explored the concept of style and its role as a type of currency and relation to power structures. This means that style can be seen as a form of capital, of which one can gain access to exclusive events. At first glance, it was assumed to be a certain power structure at the observed After Party, upheld by the style capital that could be seen by the attendees standing in the invited queue. However, due to the people standing in the uninvited queue also gaining access, where a sense of style was lacking, it was clear that the style did not act as currency to attend the “exclusive” event. The lack of style as capital, in turn undermined the intended exclusivity of the event, as it failed to keep those without the “right style” out.

Furthermore, the exclusivity at the observed Fashion Event did not meet the expectations either. The event, at which a local brand presented its collection, had received publicity prior to the event. It was published on CPHFW’s website as well featured in major magazines, indicating that the brand was worth keeping an eye on during fashion week. Because of this online publicity, we expected a certain sense of exclusivity within the event. However, arriving at the venue and realizing no other attendees were there, the expected exclusivity was not evident. Nor did the missing feel of exclusivity change over time, as only one other visitor was present while we were there. The event felt small and hidden, almost as if it had been forgotten. This led to a lack of correspondence between the digital and the physical space in terms of exclusivity, similar to the case of the After Party.

CPHFW has manipulated the physical and digital setting by limiting access to the physical space, i.e. all of the shows and some of the events, which is contributing to a high demand of participating on-site. However, the digital space has not been limited in terms of accessibility and can therefore be seen as a reason for why a digital exclusivity has not been created. Mekonnen and Larner (2018) say that it is challenging to maintain exclusivity in the adoption of digital integration, which may be applied in this sense. It can be argued that the digital space did not receive the same attention when being streamed due to the non-provided exclusivity within the digital accessibility. However, since the live stream videos received significantly more views afterwards, it could be argued that there is a value in allowing digital access to the public, as it allows for a longer life span of the fashion show, thus being able to gain attention over time.

### **6.2.2 The Insider Roles**

The highly selective guest list of the physical fashion week, as discussed by Skov et al. (2009), excludes those who do not have the right qualifications or do not have appropriate professional roles, contributing to fashion week being an exclusive event. The roles of invitees are of great importance for marketing communications of fashion week itself, for the brands hosting fashion shows, as well as for other brands involved. Invitees set the tone for how the fashion week is perceived, i.e. its reputation, and have the power to influence how the participating brands are portrayed externally (Halliday 2017). Because of the power possessed by invitees, participating brands strive to invite the right people to their fashion shows to achieve a desirable level of publicity as well as a spread of positive WOM and eWOM, which according to Barry (2014) is done with the aim to generate brand awareness, and ultimately achieve purchase decisions (Chin-Fook and Simmonds 2011).

Starting with the role of influencers and celebrities present during fashion week, which has increased greatly in line with digitization. Mohr (2017) says that influencers and celebrities are cautiously selected to generate credibility with their large number of followers on social media for brands to achieve buzz marketing. With their trusting audience, they are able to persuade their followers when posting promotional content on their platforms (Barry 2014). Brands partner up with content creators, such as influencers and celebrities who are capable of drawing value to the brand's target audience (NSS 2022), which according to Lou and Yan (2019) is perceived as more authentic than when it comes from the brand itself. But, is it really as authentic as it seems, given that some of the influencers and celebrities participating are paid collaborations? This has been questioned in the media in relation to the role of the famous faces in the front rows, which seem to attract more attention than the actual clothes shown on the runway (Barger 2023). Influencers and celebrities can benefit from assuming the role of high status, in this case as a result of being invited to fashion week, which they can showcase to their followers by posting fashion show content and thereby gaining value for their professional role and relevance.

Guests were observed taking pictures and filming during the Fashion Show 1, but also looking at their phones from time to time without paying attention to the ongoing show. On one hand, they might have been focused on uploading content to their channels, but on the other hand, they might have simply been disinterested in the show. Front row seats indicate a certain prestige of being "important" actors, as discussed by Entwistle and Rocamora (2006). When these influencers or celebrities are being captured or talked about in the media from the front row, a growing audience may perceive these as "important" people, giving the influencer/celebrity further exposure and thus a great marketing opportunity. It is difficult to say if the guests observed during the fashion show were attending out of genuine interest or if they just wanted to be perceived as exclusive insiders in the public eye. What is certain, however, is that the participation of influencers and celebrities in fashion shows is being questioned, indicating skepticism and credibility concerns among the public and may have a negative effect on the marketing efforts.

Journalists, editors, and photographers are primarily invited to fashion week to contribute to media coverage (Pinchera and Rinallo 2021). They are invited either by the host organization, in this case CPHFW, or by the participating brands. Additionally, photographers can also get access to fashion week by additional clients, i.e. guests or magazines (Luvaas 2018). This partnership is mutually beneficial for all parties involved. Journalists and editors get access to the shows and are able to deliver exclusive articles to their audience, which in turn gives publicity for CPHFW and the promoted brands. Guests benefit from being captured in images from attending shows or street style, to later appear in magazines and receive media attention, i.e. influencers being seen in Teen Vogue among other magazines (Delgado 2023). Photographers get access to shows and events to capture exclusive photos from the runways as well as street style to its clients, making them gain commercial exposure when being featured.

### **6.2.3 The Strategic Front Row**

As previously discussed, the fashion week's guest list is highly selective as the guests are the ones who set the tone for how fashion week is perceived, and they have the power to influence how participating brands are portrayed, as well as create buzz. The invitees are assigned different seats at the shows, as the power of each invitee differs between them,

making seating an important element of fashion week. This enables gatekeeping that can be used as a strategic tool to achieve exclusivity (Skov et al. 2009), which in turn contributes to successful marketing communication efforts.

Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) discuss fashion week seating as a hierarchical placement of invitees, explaining that where someone is seated depends on one's field of practice, which determines the person's importance. This hierarchical structure was evident at Fashion Show 1 during CPHFW, where the seating plan was mapped out in relation to each guest's profession and status within the field. Moreover, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) argue that the most important guests therefore get to sit in the front row, e.g. celebrities or influential journalists, since they are the ones who will be seen in various media, reflecting their high-ranked status onto the brand. As stated by Pas (2003), cited by Entwistle and Rocamora (2006), "the light from the catwalk shines only on the front row". These aspects of hierarchical arrangements were exemplified during CPHFW when a brand employee informed the seaters that the people sitting in a certain section of the front row should be welcomed exceptionally well, as they were considered more important. They were the ones the brand wanted the lights to shine on. The results showed that the presence of some of the guests seated in the front row attracted publicity and generated buzz for the brand. Seating strategy could therefore be considered valuable from a brand perspective, as the status of the invitees is transferred to the brand.

Seating strategy has also become beneficial for influencers and celebrities due to social media. According to Findlay (2017), being invited to fashion week shows is prestigious since it gives the invitee the opportunity to participate in an inaccessible fashion field. It can therefore be argued that influencers and celebrities benefit from showcasing their high-status role as front row guests to their followers by publishing front row content. Thereby, they gain marketing opportunities as the exclusivity of the event is reflected onto the content creator. People that were seated in the front row of Fashion Show 1 were observed taking selfies during the show, and a large amount of front row content was posted throughout CPHFW on both Instagram and TikTok, suggesting that these influencers took advantage of the opportunity to claim the status of the front row.

Physical seating arrangements for guests are considered prestigious and difficult to access, and therefore contribute to a certain exclusivity that reflects both the brand and the attendees. For digital shows, everyone gets a seat anonymously. By not showing the identities of the audience, the attendance of the digital shows did not signal the prestige and status like those attending a physical show. In this way, the exclusivity that traditionally has been a feature of fashion shows, according to Entwistle and Rocamora (2006), is not maintained at the digital fashion shows. The digital presence, however, according to Dunn (2018) can be used to deliberately create a hierarchical position towards the public. By the digital followers gaining access through social media and thereby remain outsiders, the attendance to the physical shows and events remains exclusive and prestigious. Thus, shows an interconnectedness between the digital and physical activities in the creation of exclusiveness around the event. Although attempts have been made toward inclusivity with the help of digital communication, a physical invitation to fashion week remains fixed to the most prestigious actors and demonstrates the hierarchical structure of the industry, which is neither willing nor able to give up its notion of exclusivity (NSS 2022).

On the other hand, it can be argued that while the hierarchical positions among the attendees is still influential on the exclusivity of fashion week, the exclusivity of the front row seats has

in recent years been discussed as something that is being eroded, especially after the pandemic. Bourne (2022) discusses that TikTok influencers have become part of fashion week's guest lists as something that is hard to fathom, highlighting a disillusionment over the fact that editors and movie stars now have to share the front row with TikTok influencers. As mentioned by Mondalek and Nanda (2021), the accounts of TikTok influencers became huge during the pandemic and gained millions of followers overnight. TikTok grew into a powerhouse during this time and became the fastest growing social media platform in 2020 (Marketing Charts 2021). The platform therefore holds massive influential power among its audience.

Since many TikTok influencers have a large following and thereby gained power in a sense that they have become hugely influential, TikTok influencers are sought after by brands but also by fashion week. This was evident during CPHFW, as CPHFW themselves partnered up with three TikTok influencers. They were given front row seats at most shows where they created front row content and generated attention for CPHFW, brands, and themselves. Unlike other influencers, celebrities, and others sitting in the front row, TikTok influencers have not spent as much time building their brand due to their overnight fame. With the rapid growth of their fame and the majority of its users being Gen Z, people born after year 1996 (Muliadi 2020), it could be argued that the reluctance towards Gen Z is due to people not being up to date on new influencers, especially generations older than Gen Z who do not use the platform. They have therefore not realized the influence that these TikTok influencers actually possess, as well as their status as fashion figures and thus immediately believe that they are eroding the exclusivity of the front row.

The decrease of exclusivity due to influencers has been discussed in other settings of the fashion industry as well. The yearly Met Gala, taking place in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in New York City, has long been perceived as a highly prestigious event within the fashion industry, with a well thought out guest list including A-list celebrities. However, as influencers began taking place on the red carpet in 2021, critics were quick to question the exclusivity of the event due to their presence. In an article for Page Six, a newspaper reporting on the latest in popular culture, Nathan and Siegler (2021) states: "gone from super prestigious to being full of influencers", indicating a dichotomy between influencers and prestige. This perhaps led to the reason for the banning of all influencers from the red carpet during the 2023 Met Gala. However, the banning of influencers on the Met Gala has also been discussed on social media as something outdated, e.g. by Josh Richards, a TikTok influencer with over 26M followers on his account, who states: "They hate us cause they ain't us" (Bffpod 2023). One could argue that instead of exclusivity being eroded, perhaps it is the exclusivity as we know it that is changing and taking on a different form. We might be in a time where exclusivity is not reduced to only those professions that historically have been highly valued in the fashion industry as influential trendsetters, such as editors and movie stars. Instead, it could be anyone with a large following on social media. Having great influence on others is the backbone of a trendsetter. Hence, one could question why traditional front row guests are considered more exclusive than influencers if both are highly influential, but perhaps towards different audiences.

#### **6.2.4 Social Media Attention**

During CPHFW, the collaborations between brands and influencers could be observed both physically and digitally. Influencers were seen attending fashion shows of brands which they

collaborated with. At the fashion shows, the influencers were seated in the front row, dressed in the respective brand's products. The attendance of the physical fashion shows was also observed online, with the influencers posting front row content as well as content shot outside the fashion show venues on Instagram and TikTok. Moreover, the collaborations did not only take place at the fashion show venues on-site, but also included images of their fashion week outfits dressed in clothes from their collaborative partners in different settings, as well as "follow me around", and GRWM videos on Instagram or TikTok that were created in partnership with a brand. According to Andersson and Jandér (2016) social media has been a key player in changing how fashion is presented during fashion week, highlighting that Instagram is a necessity for a brand to survive and that its culture has reinvented fashion week as an event for entertaining the public.

Influencer collaborations is a powerful marketing strategy for brands participating in the fashion week as Mohr (2017) means that influencers often have a great following on social media, and thus can directly reach and entertain the public. Due to this, Stark (2018) argues influencers are a great way to generate buzz and attention and thus shows that the various types of content that stems from the collaborations between brands on social media is a great marketing tool for brands. However, as mentioned by Barry (2014), brands can achieve brand awareness and trustworthiness by collaborating with suitable influencers who create promotional content, indicating that the values of the influencer needs to be in line with the core values of the brand. Therefore, it could be argued that a brand collaboration with an influencer, which is not in line with the identity and values of the brand, could instead diminish the benefits of collaborating.

Besides paid collaborations between different actors, other social media content can be argued to have similar effects in terms of generating marketing value for the involved parties. Small interviews with guests attending the shows, which can be considered as a type of street style content, gained recognition on CPHFW's TikTok account. The guests were showing off their favorite pieces included in their outfits and mentioned the brands behind them, commonly brands participating in this season of CPHFW, which in turn led to brand promotion content in terms of eWOM. Although some of the guests seen in the video probably collaborated with the mentioned brands, it gave a credible and authentic impression since the interviews came off as spontaneous and were conducted by a third party, which according to Notarantonio and Quigley (2009), makes it seem trustworthy. The eWOM that was created through the videos is seen as an element in buzz marketing (Mohr 2017), thus benefiting the mentioned brands.

In terms of influencer collaborations benefiting brands, the partnership is also beneficial for the influencer involved. An influencer who becomes visible in the collaborating brand's channels achieves greater reach and awareness around their own name and brand. Taking the example from the influencers that CPHFW partnered up with on TikTok, where two out of three influencers got a follower increase on their Instagram platforms in February 2023. Although it is difficult to address whether it was specifically the CPHFW collaboration that led to the increase that month, at least it did not lean towards something negative. Regardless of whether it led to direct results in terms of more followers or not, these influencers have been associated with actors within a limited field of Scandinavian fashion, i.e. CPHFW, and being featured in magazines. The collaboration is therefore adding further status and value to the influencers' own brand and may act as a gate opener for future collaborations.

An overarching focus throughout CPHFW was to create moments that amaze. This, according to Baskin (2022), is due to the emergence of fashion week's digital attributes that have led brands to focus on marketing activities through social media platforms, in order to reach a wider audience. Fashion week is therefore fixated on creating shows that generate attention on social media. Many of the guests attending CPHFW are influencers and celebrities, owning social media accounts with large followings. These actors are able to spread content to a large audience where contagious dialogues can continue, and thereby create buzz around a happening (Notarantonio and Quigley 2009).

Several influencers and celebrities were seen on a number of runways during CPHFW, resulting in these being featured in a number of fashion magazines and creating buzz on social media. The audience do not expect influencers or celebrities to actually walk the show, rather being there as a guest, thus making their runway appearance surprising and exciting. The celebrity appearance that stood out during CPHFW was Lisa Rinna walking for Rotate. According to Stark (2018), this is a celebrity seeding strategy used to create buzz and gain marketing value. It was evident that Lisa Rinna's appearance created buzz as it gained a lot of attention on multiple social media accounts as well as it was highlighted by international media. Magazines have written about her appearances as "unexpected and brilliant", and that "she brought the heat up" (Harding 2023; Eleuterio 2023).

The element of surprise, is according to Mohr (2017), an important characteristic in order for a moment to go viral on social media, which can be argued for why this appearance went viral. Mohr (2017) states content in a quickly consumed format with the ability of evoking arousal, generating value, and appealing to broad interests are common attributes involved in content going viral, which can all be applied to Lisa Rinna's appearance. Due to her being a famous American reality star, with an Instagram following of currently 3.6 million followers (Rinna 2023), she is not associated with the Scandinavian fashion scene, thus making her appearance on CPHFW unexpected and surprising. Stark (2018) states that surprising and shocking elements of a fashion show is what gains the most attention and media coverage, which can be applied to this case. Rotate's marketing strategy in having Lisa Rinna on the runway resulted in Rotate gaining worldwide publicity as well as Lisa Rinna becoming a fashion figure, adding further value to her status. This indicates a mutual partnership that benefits both parties.

Another viral moment of CPHFW was when (Di)vision's model dragged the table cloth as part of her outfit where a shocking, yet exciting, reaction was given by the audience. The brand posted the event on TikTok and received over 4 million views in just one week. This is in line with what Stark (2018) argues makes content gain attention and forms the basis for possibly going viral.

Viral content is in turn something that contributes to buzz. It could be argued that the buzz created from this viral video also brought additional attention to the show, which was seen on CPHFW's Instagram, where the reel receiving the most attention was the one covering (Di)vision's collection. Although CPHFW posted similar content for all brands, (Di)vision in particular received the most attention, which can be argued to be a result of the buzz the brand received during CPHFW due to their viral moment. This supports the importance of creating viral moments at a show to gain brand attention, which is further confirmed by Eline stating "everyone wants to create the new viral moment to make sure we stand out".

Apart from the physical gatekeepers i.e. influencers and celebrities, the audience receiving the posted content plays a key role in continuing sharing the content and thus go viral. Moreover, this is what Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011) explain as the multidirectional flow of information that enables all actors on digital platforms to become possible gatekeepers. This concludes that the audience also plays a big part in the collaboration of making something going viral.

The involvement of the aforementioned actors leads to extensive multi-collaboration between the parties involved, each benefiting in one way or another from the physical presence and roles of the other. As mentioned, if something is done or disseminated in a negative sense, it can have a negative meaning, affecting multiple actors as they interact with each other. However, when something is successful, most of the involved actors benefit. Take the example of (Di)vision's viral moment, which came to be the most viewed content on CPHFW's Instagram account during the AW 23 season. Not only did this lead to huge publicity for (Di)vision, but it also benefited CPHFW, who gained attention because of the viral moment. Invited influencers who managed to capture this happening also benefited, as they posted it on their own social media channels and gained widespread exposure.

In order for buzz to be created around a phenomenon or brand, there must be people on-site who choose to highlight it and draw attention to it in the form of WOM or eWOM (Mohr 2017). Would (Di)vision's tablecloth happening have gotten as much attention if the show was digital only? Probably not, because the gatekeepers have a value in being physically present in order for things to be seen and spread.

## 7 Conclusion

Speculation of the demise of fashion week has been around for years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, with industry actors questioning the value of physical participation at fashion week. When the pandemic hit, these concerns were further highlighted due to fashion weeks fully adapting to digital formats. Despite these discussions, CPHFW AW 23, has shown that the physical presence is valuable in a post-pandemic setting in regards to marketing communication. On the contrary to the speculations of the digital setting of fashion week replacing the physical attendance, the findings indicate that the value of the physical presence has instead been strengthened by digitization. While the physical location of fashion week attracts fashion actors and legitimizes Copenhagen as a fashion city, the digitization of fashion week enhances the image of the city through marketing communication online as well as generating buzz to gain attention, placing Copenhagen on the map as an emerging fashion capital.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that there is a strong interdependence between the digital and physical fashion week, where the digital does not have an obvious position of power because it is dependent on the physical presence. Fashion week has evolved to being a phenomenon conducted physically with the aim of reaching a digital audience through the creation of spectacular on-site moments being shared online. This points to a complex power relationship between the two. Therefore, the value of physical presence is still strong in a post-pandemic setting of fashion week, in regards to marketing communication, thus answering the purpose of this study. It is not only a complex power relationship that exists between the two, but also a discrepancy that takes place, where the two do not always correlate. This contributes to two different images of the fashion week, one physical and one digital. The digital presence can translate into viral moments and reach a wide audience, making it more important than the physical presence in terms of marketing communication. However, it is still dependent on the physical aspect as it otherwise would not exist, which confirms the power dynamic between the two. In terms of an emerging fashion capital that does not yet have an established position, the translation of the physical presence to the digital realm becomes even more important as it promotes the fashion week to a global audience. It enables CPHFW to communicate elements of differentiation digitally, which in turn strengthens the attractiveness of the physical presence.

With the focus on making fashion week digitally appealing, its exclusivity follows into the digital realm. This indicates a shift in exclusivity where the exclusivity is no longer about being in the room. Instead, it is about the presence of being in the room attracting attention digitally. The exclusivity takes form in the ability to translate something happening in the physical space into the digital space, by making it appear more attractive. Fashion week's digital attributes have not only contributed to a new type of digital exclusivity, but have also led to a shift in gatekeepers. Influencers as the new gatekeepers of fashion have been discussed in previous research. However, their legitimacy has been questioned by industry players. The online exclusivity indirectly gives influencers more legitimacy as gatekeepers, which has not previously been the case when they were considered to decrease the exclusivity of the front row. This shift moves exclusivity from the traditional gatekeepers who were in the room, to gatekeepers whose job involves being active and produce content online, i.e. influencers. The new form of exclusivity allows actors to create an exclusivity online that may not be seen in the physical space, which in other words can be said to constitute an illusion of exclusivity maintained online. Thereby, the gap in previous research has been

filled by providing new research within the field of fashion marketing by examining fashion week in a post-pandemic setting through the lens of Copenhagen Fashion Week. In terms of managerial implications, the findings of the study indicate that marketers should focus on creating a marketing strategy that is implemented in the physical environment with the aim of appealing to the digital audience to achieve beneficial marketing results.

The findings of this research have brought an additional question to the surface. However, it could not be further examined due to the scope and purpose of this study, making it a possible topic for future research. The aspect of striving to create viral moments during fashion week has been questioned. As everyone is competing in creating the next viral moment, the relevance of it is diminishing, as it takes away the authenticity of the brand. Hence, raises the question of how long it will continue to provide marketing benefits. Creating viral moments seems to be the main aim of digital presence, but will the importance of the digital presence decrease alongside with the importance of viral moments disappearing? As fashion often moves from one extreme to another, often referred to as the pendulum swing of fashion (Rouso and Kaplan Ostroff 2018), it is possible that the next step in this development moves away from the pursuit of being the newest viral moment. Therefore, potential future research could be conducted from a trend forecasting perspective looking at the possible next step in this development.

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