

Shades of Evaluative Meaning in Web-based Company Communications: The Case of Fashion Brands

Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli

Abstract

This paper explores how fashion companies use web-based communication to express evaluative meanings. Based on a corpus of texts collected from the websites and Facebook pages of a large sample of fashion brands, the study sets out to understand which evaluative meanings are conveyed, which are the most prominent, and whether any patterns of meaning emerge. The analysis focuses on evaluative adjectives, which were exhaustively analysed using a combination of different corpus techniques including part-of-speech tagging and semantic annotation. Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory was applied to identify distinctive facets of evaluative meaning. The findings suggest that fashion companies exploit web-based communication to convey highly nuanced evaluative meanings that can trigger emotions and perceptions linked to self-identity and social values, well beyond mere aesthetic appreciation related to the appearance and quality of fashion products.

Keywords: fashion discourse, fashion brands, web-based communication, evaluation, corpus linguistics, part-of-speech tagging, semantic annotation.

1. Introduction

Since the mid 1990s, companies have benefitted from using new media platforms that allow them to provide information, promote their brands, and engage with consumers without geographical or temporal barriers (Quelch and Klein 1996). Company websites were the first to be exploited in this sense and they now play a fundamental role in shaping consumer perceptions. Modern consumers interact with company websites as proactive pursuers of information about brands, products, and services (Madhavaram and Appan 2010), and are no longer simply passive receivers of promotional texts that they happen to encounter. For this reason, company websites are

now a well consolidated tool through which companies distinguish themselves and seek to influence consumer choices (Salvi, Turnbull, Pontesilli 2007). Moreover, companies tend to use their websites in a strategic way. For example, Hwang, McMillan and Lee's (2003: 12) analysis of 160 corporate websites found that clothing and footwear companies have a significantly higher presence of messages classified as "transformational" (i.e., those that highlight the psychological characteristics of consumers who use the brand), in contrast to the websites of computer and audio/video companies, where messages were "informational".

Research on consumers' perceptions of company websites has underscored the importance of effective and high-quality web-based communications that are able to stimulate positive reactions (Müller and Chandon 2003; Kim and Stoel 2004; Siddiqui, O'Malley, McColl, Birtwistle 2003). Successful companies have also learned to harness the affordances of social media to build relations and maintain message control among modern digitally sophisticated consumers (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, Silvestre 2011). Even long established companies that are steeped in tradition now utilise social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which provide them with opportunities to engage more directly with customers in an effort to steer perceptions in the desired direction, and thus build loyalty (Kim and Ko 2012).

This paper investigates how fashion companies use web-based communication to define their brands, representing a type of language that broadly falls under the umbrella term of *fashion discourse*, characterised by Thompson and Haytko (1997: 15) as "ways of talking about fashion". The decision to focus the analysis on fashion brands derives from their capacity to evoke strong attitudes and emotions (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Xun and Reynolds 2010), and to create unique sets of meanings (Keller, Apéria, Georgson 2008). Such meanings are typically expressed by adjectives that encode (positive) value-laden concepts such as *elegant*, *trendy*, or *iconic* (Maehle and Supphellen 2011). The language used by the fashion discourse community also tends to be richly articulated and expressive, with a pronounced rhetorical dimension (Barthes 1990 [1967]; Borrelli 1997; König 2006; Crawford Camiciottoli 2016). The web-based communication of fashion companies thus offers fertile ground for exploring evaluative meanings at the intersection

of linguistics and marketing (Ranfagni, Guercini, Crawford Camiciottoli 2014), with applications for both professionals and students of business communication.

The research was guided by the following questions:

- a) Which evaluative meanings are conveyed through the language used by fashion companies in their web-based communication?
- b) Which evaluative meanings are the most prominent?
- c) Do any distinctive patterns of evaluative meaning emerge?

2. Methodology

The analysis is based on a corpus of texts collected from the websites and Facebook pages of fashion brands, hereafter referred to as FWCC (Fashion Web-based Communication Corpus). The online textual sources to be included in the corpus were first identified from a list of fashion brands on Style.com, which served as an Internet-based source of news for the global fashion community at the time of corpus collection¹. Although the listed brands represented a wide range of national origins, their websites were provided in English as the firmly established *lingua franca* of the international fashion world.

The first criterion for inclusion in the corpus was that the websites and/or Facebook pages had sufficient amounts of text that could be accessed and collected². The amount of textual data available for this purpose varied considerably for different reasons. For example, many websites had very little text because they were primarily image based. Others had blocks which prevented the collection of any text. Some of the lesser known fashion brands did not even have websites or Facebook pages. As a result of these constraints, the corpus represents just over 100 brands and contains 195,555 tokens, of which 135,142 (69.2%) were derived from websites and 60,143 (30.8%) from Facebook pages.

¹ Style.com is no longer available as a fashion news source. It transitioned into an online shopping website associated with Vogue.com in 2015.

² I did not collect data from Twitter due to the very limited amount of text involved (max 140 characters per tweet at the time of data collection), which rendered it impractical for the selective manual collection method used in this study. To efficiently collect Twitter data for corpus analysis, some kind of automatic data mining procedure, e.g., through the Twitter API, would need to be implemented.

The second inclusion criterion involved selecting only those texts with an underlying promotional purpose (e.g., company-produced descriptions of collections, brand-related press communications, or interviews with house designers). Such texts would be most likely to contain evaluative meanings highlighting fashion brand attributes, and thus be in line with the focus of this study, in contrast to other available texts focusing on financial results or corporate operations (e.g., earning releases).

In order to systematically analyse evaluative meanings, the corpus was processed in three phases. It was first run through the CLAWS4 part-of-speech tagger (Garside and Smith 1997), which automatically identifies the part-of-speech of each word and tags it accordingly³. Then, WordSmith Tools (Scott 2010) was used to query the corpus for all adjectives by means of the general adjective tag JJ. Although other word classes can encode evaluative meanings, I limited the present analysis only to adjectives in order to render it feasible, while also following Martin and White (2005: 58), who describe adjectives as the canonical realisation of attitude. The initial query retrieved 17,347 adjectives across the corpus. The concordance tool was then used to facilitate various phases of re-sorting and filtering in order to reduce the output to those concordance lines containing adjectives that conveyed evaluative meanings of potential interest to this study. The criterion for evaluation was Thompson and Hunston's (2001) broad characterisation as means through which speakers and writers express attitudes, judgements and feelings. The reduction process entailed the removal of large numbers of unwanted items, specifically neutral adjectives that were essentially void of evaluative meaning (e.g., *available*, *various*, *other*), in addition to adjectives that were factually descriptive of physical attributes, such as colour, size/dimension, shape, and nationality. It should be noted that any adjective can probably take on an evaluative meaning, given an appropriate context of interaction. Hence I opted to consider only those adjectives that were either inherently

³ The CLAWS tagger was developed by UCREL (University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language) of Lancaster University (UK) and is described as having an accuracy rate of approximately 95%. It is freely available for processing limited amounts of text at <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws/trial.html>.

evaluative, or could be interpreted as evaluative in the context of usage. To control for reliability in the process of distinguishing evaluative adjectives, I asked two expert colleagues to analyse a random sample of 100 concordance lines and classify the adjectives therein as evaluative or non-evaluative in meaning within their context of usage. Inter-rater reliability was then assessed with Fleiss' kappa, which returned a value of 0.81, indicating a high level of agreement. Once the filtering process was completed, a total of 3,187 concordance lines remained. From this output, a separate file was created that contained only the node adjective in each concordance line, thus consisting exclusively of adjective tokens (hereafter referred to as the adjective dataset).

In the second phase, the adjective dataset described above was processed with Wmatrix (Rayson 2008) to produce a word frequency list, as well as a list of all semantic domains represented within it by means of the USAS (UCREL Semantic Analysis System) tagger. In particular, this tool classified each adjective on the basis of over 200 pre-established semantic domains. It was then possible to scrutinise all the domains and the items assigned to them in order to identify those that encoded more highly nuanced evaluative meanings in fashion brand communication. During this process, I referred to Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory, specifically the *attitude* component, which is further articulated into *affect* (expression of feelings and emotions attributed to oneself or to others), *judgement* (praise or criticism of behaviours, especially on the moral and ethical levels), and *appreciation* (positive or negative evaluation of concrete or abstract entities)⁴.

In the third phase, the entire FWCC was processed with the USAS annotation tool incorporated into Wmatrix (Rayson 2008) to determine which domains of evaluative meaning that had been identified in the second phase might also be distinctive of the corpus as a whole. The software calculates a keyness score to identify semantic domains that are statistically significant in the target corpus when compared to a reference corpus⁵. To confirm

⁴ Apart from *attitude*, there are two other over-arching components in the model: *engagement* and *graduation*. See Martin and White (2005) for further information.

⁵ The AmEo6 corpus of general written American English (966,609 words) incorporated within Wmatrix was selected as the reference corpus after a

statistical significance, I applied the general guidelines provided on the Wmatrix platform whereby a keyness score of 6.63 or above corresponds a 99% level of confidence ($p < 0.01$).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Frequency analysis of the adjective dataset

Table 1 lists the most frequent adjective types and corresponding frequencies across the adjective dataset, as generated by the wordlist tool of Wmatrix. There were 676 adjective types; for reasons of space, only the 50 most frequent types are listed. Over half of the total (51.7%) appear only once in the dataset, indicating a high degree of variation in the expression of evaluative meanings and thus corroborating previous research on journalistic fashion texts and fashion blogs that similarly found a strong presence and rich articulation of adjectives (Borrelli 1997; König 2006; Crawford Camiciottoli 2016).

Some items in Table 1 have obvious and inherent positive meanings (e.g., *beautiful*, *elegant*, *precious*, *perfect*). However, the evaluative meanings of others are less straightforward and emerge only within their context of usage in FWCC, where they are often combined with other positively-charged lexical items to seemingly draw from each other in a synergistic manner, as shown in examples 1-5.

- (1) The GG hallmark is now globally synonymous with high glamour, desirability and a *contemporary* edge.
- (2) The brand's philosophy is distinctive for blending tradition with a certain sex appeal and an energy that reflects the times - notably by playing on notions of gender and a signature that is at once *light* and elegant.
- (3) In 2005, Murad debuts the first Zuhair Murad Ready-to-Wear Collection, a more *simple* - yet still aesthetically glamorous - contemporary line designed to meet the expanding needs of his clientele.
- (4) Emporio Armani collection for women is supremely Armani in its stylistic concept, but invigorated by an *unexpected* sense of lightness adding extra brio and energy to the classic values of an Armani wardrobe.
- (5) Their pure lines over distinct materials reveal ideas of great *masculine* chic.

preliminary analysis of the orthographic features of FWCC, which revealed a predominance of American English.

TABLE 1
50 most frequent types in adjective dataset

Rank	Adjective	Frequency	Rank	Adjective	Frequency
1	modern	104	26	natural	28
2	unique	82	27	strong	26
3	iconic	77	28	sexy	25
4	contemporary	76	29	bold	24
5	luxury	73	30	refined	22
6	classic	58	31	simple	22
7	aesthetic	57	32	sensual	22
8	feminine	52	33	different	21
9	exclusive	49	34	fine	20
10	chic	43	35	young	20
11	innovative	43	36	unexpected	20
12	luxurious	37	37	creative	19
13	soft	36	38	rich	19
14	original	34	39	relaxed	18
15	beautiful	33	40	sleek	17
16	fresh	33	41	organic	17
17	sophisticated	33	42	cool	16
18	elegant	33	43	special	16
19	timeless	32	44	casual	16
20	precious	32	45	pure	16
21	romantic	32	46	masculine	15
22	perfect	29	47	renowned	15
23	light	29	48	glamorous	14
24	distinctive	28	49	tailored	14
25	traditional	28	50	amazing	13

3.2. Semantic analysis of the adjective dataset

The USAS tagger dispersed the items in the adjective dataset across 91 over-arching semantic domains. Although all the items had been classified as potentially evaluative during the preliminary selection described in Section 2, careful scrutiny of these domains reveals that only nine contain adjectives whose meanings can be clearly interpreted on the basis of Martin and

White's appraisal model, as will be further explained in the commentary below⁶. Table 2 lists the nine domains and their assigned items according to frequency (in parentheses), from most to least frequent.

TABLE 2

Evaluative semantic domains in the adjective dataset

Semantic domain/tag(s)	Items
Judgement of appearance: Positive/ O4.2+, O.4++	luxury (73), aesthetic (57), exclusive, (49), chic (43), luxurious (37), beautiful (33), elegant (33), sophisticated, (33), sleek (17), glamorous (14), amazing (13), exquisite (13), clean (12), stylish (11), stunning (8), delicate (8), fashionable (7), lovely (6), pretty (6), gorgeous (6), cute (5), decorative (4), attractive (4), lush (3), opulent (3), smart (3), graceful (3), nice (3), spectacular (3), lavish (2), desirable (2) discerning (2), well-made (2), delightful (2), neat (2), captivating (2), appealing (2), beguiling (2), resplendent (2), upmarket (1), dapper (1), delectable (1), handsome (1), classy (1), adorable (1), breath-taking (1), awesome (1), majestic (1), impressive (1), lithe (1), radiant (1), glam (1), trendy (1), charming (1), eye-popping (1)
Evaluation: Good/ A5.1+, A5.1+++	perfect (29), fine (20), high-quality (10), fabulous (8), impeccable (8), great (8), brilliant (7), excellent (5), high performance (4), super (4), sublime (4), ideal (3), superior (3), dazzling (3), magnificent (2), wonderful (2), high quality(2), unparalleled (2), good (2), flawless (1), elite (1), unstoppable (1), top-quality (1), fab (1), exemplary (1), fantastic (1), first-class (1), splendid (1), optimal (1), unsurpassed (1), world-class (1), outstanding (1)

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⁶ Examples of domains/*assigned items* that were deemed as not clearly aligned with the model include Time: New and young/*modern*, Flying and aircraft/*floating*, Sensory: touch/*tactile*, Size: big/*spacious*, Places/*urban*, Science and technology/*technical*.

TABLE 2 (continued from previous page)

Semantic domain/tag(s)	Items
Evaluation: Authentic/ A _{5.4+}	pure (16), authentic (11), genuine (3), unadulterated (1)
Important/ A _{11.1+}	iconic (77), prominent (3), important (3), high-profile (2), ground-breaking (1), stellar (1), significant (1), all-important (1), paramount (1)
Interested/excited/energetic/ X _{5.2+}	vibrant (9), dynamic (8), interesting (5), alluring (3), enchanting (3), exhilarating (2), exuberant (2), exciting (2), intriguing (2), provocative (2), active (1), sensational (1), racy (1), enticing (1), arty (1), passionate (1), impassioned (1), feisty (1), stimulating (1), fascinating (1), lively (1)
Able/intelligent/ X _{9.1+}	talented (12), visionary (3), intelligent (3), skilled (5), witty (2), gifted (2), ingenious (2)
Respected /S _{7.2+}	renowned (15), prestigious (9), acclaimed (5)
Ethical/ G _{2.2+}	ethical (12), noble (6)
Happy/ E _{4.1+}	playful (9), fun (6), joyful (3), uplifting (2), wacky (2)

Four domains listed in Table 2 (*Judgement of appearance: Positive, Evaluation: Good, Evaluation: Authentic, Important, and Interested/excited/energetic*) could be conceptually mapped onto the *appreciation* component of Martin and White's (2005: 56) model in a relatively straightforward way, as they could all be feasibly interpreted as "our evaluation of 'things'". In particular, *appreciation* entails reactions in terms of something/someone that pleases and/or catches attention (e.g., *beautiful, exhilarating, stunning*), composition in terms of balance and complexity (e.g., *pure, clean, elegant*), and valuation in terms of how worthwhile or important something/someone is (e.g., *superior, prominent, high-profile*) (Martin and White 2005). These three nuanced meanings of *appreciation* are illustrated in examples 6-8, respectively.

(6) *Eye-popping* lemon yellow, peppermint, peach and purple are key colours. Take your pick from the fashion palette.

(7) Embroidered floral detail graces the back of this *sleek* navy gown from the Carolina Herrera Pre Fall collection.

(8) The acquisition of Barrie business by Chanel is all the more natural as the factory has worked with us for more than 25 years, producing cashmere knitwear including Chanel's *iconic* two-tone cashmere cardigans.

Three domains (*Able/intelligent*, *Respected*, and *Ethical*) could be mapped onto *judgement*, specifically adjectives that reflect social esteem or moral values in relation to behaviours and actions (e.g., *talented*, *acclaimed*, *ethical*), as shown in examples 9-11. Of particular interest is example (9) which exemplifies cases in which a socially esteemed trait (i.e., *visionary* in the *Able/intelligent* domain) is specifically attributed to the designer, who plays a crucial role in the image of fashion companies. This example also serves to further highlight the tendency to combine various evaluative meanings within the same sentence (i.e., *visionary*, *eclectic*, *iconic*).

(9) *Visionary*, eclectic, and iconic, Karl Lagerfeld would most certainly have been an enlightened mind in the Age of Enlightenment.

(10) Valentino Haute Couture offers a variety of collections made up of unique items singularly handcrafted in the *prestigious* atelier situated in Rome.

(11) Ræburn is fast becoming known for his pioneering work towards the future of *ethical* design.

The domain *Happy* seems to most clearly correspond to *affect*, by means of adjectives that are associated with positive feelings and emotions such as *fun*, *joyful*, and *uplifting*, as illustrated in example 12.

(12) Rebecca Minkoff's *playful* and subtly edgy designs can be spotted around the world on young women and celebrities alike.

While most items in Table 2 appear to have been assigned to the conceptual domains by Wmatrix in a largely coherent way, a few item-domain pairings seem somewhat questionable. For example, the items *stylish* and *fashionable* allocated to the domain *Judgement of appearance: Positive* and *elite* to the domain *Evaluation: Good* could also reflect social esteem, and therefore encode *judgement* as well as *appreciation*. Such borderline cases, illustrated in examples 13-14, highlight the subjective dimension of this type of semantic analysis, which inevitably comes into play to some extent.

(13) It is known today as the Pringle signature argyle pattern, which was immediately adopted by the Duke of Windsor and the *fashionable* set of the time.

(14) If anyone was skeptical that a personality like Zoe could pull off product at a more *elite* level than mass - which she has covered with her QVC line - her retail presence is evidence to the contrary.

The item *wacky* in *Happy* (example 15) is a particularly interesting case as it has been defined in different ways: in the Merriam Webster dictionary, “absurdly or amusingly eccentric or irrational”, while in the Cambridge English Dictionary “unusual in a pleasing and exciting or silly way”⁷. Thus, in addition to positive feelings, *wacky* seems to integrate elements of both *appreciation* and *judgement*, and not always in an entirely positive sense as seen in the words *irrational* and *silly* used in the definitions. According to its developers, the USAS tagger is loosely based on the Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English (McArthur 1981), and one of the semantic domains included in this source is “Happiness – feeling pleasure”, to which the item *wacky* apparently refers. However, follow-up contextual analysis revealed that this item is actually used in a critical sense (example 15). The adjective is found in a press release posted on the fashion company’s website about recent staff changes among house designers, which comes to the defence of a designer who had been dismissed. This example underlines the importance of follow-up qualitative analysis of the context of usage both to clarify meanings in appropriate instances, and to appreciate style, which in this particular instance of web-based communication, is informal and clever.

(15) It was clear from the get-go after the abrupt firing of Alessandra Facchinetti (who didn’t, by the way, go three-sleeve *wacky* with the house heritage) that Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli had a mandate: Stick to the style of Valentino himself.

On the whole, the results of the in-depth analysis of evaluative meanings in FWCC are in substantial alignment with Martin and

⁷ https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wacky?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wacky>.

White's (2005) framework, with those that encode *appreciation* being the most prominent (as could be expected given the promotional nature of the discourse), followed by meanings linked to social esteem (i.e., *judgement*). Interestingly, this social value, encoded by various adjectives in the data, is also reflected in the scholarly definition of fashion as:

a culturally endorsed form of expression, in a particular material or non-material phenomenon, which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system or group of associated individuals. (Sproles 1974: 464)

3.3. Key evaluative domains in FWCC

Table 3 lists the keyness scores of the previously identified evaluative semantic domains in FWCC. Wmatrix uses the log likelihood statistic, which computes the keyness score by comparing the observed frequencies of items categorised in a given domain to their expected frequencies, while taking into account the size of the target corpus vs. the reference corpus. As the table shows, all the keyness scores are well above the threshold of 6.63 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that differences in frequency of these domains between FWCC and the American English reference corpus are statistically significant.

TABLE 3
Key evaluative semantic domains in FWCC

Domain/tag	FWCC (N)	AmEo6 (N)	Keyness score
Important/A11.1	90	2734	531.28
Evaluation: Good/A5.1	139	2973	445.53
Happy/E4.1+	22	1372	358.02
Interested/excited/ energetic/X5.2	49	1706	356.27
Able/intelligent/ X9.1	29	1014	212.21

(continued on next page)

TABLE 3 (continued from previous page)

Domain/tag	FWCC (N)	AmEo6 (N)	Keyness score
Ethical/G2.2	18	546	106.01
Judgement of appearance: Positive/O4.2	546	1630	94.93
Evaluation: Authentic/A5.4	31	4	87.07
Respected /S7.2	18	546	44.14

Although the scores show a wide range of variation – from under 50 to over 500 – the relatively high score of *Evaluation: Good* is clearly in line with the underlying rationale for company-produced promotional fashion communication. However, somewhat surprisingly, the very similar construct of *Judgement of appearance: Positive* has a relatively low score, despite the fact that it contains by far the most lexical items, as well as the most varied. In fact, other semantic domains emerged as considerably more distinctive of FWCC. The highest score of *Important*, together with the score of *Respected*, could reflect a strong emphasis on the prestige of the fashion house, as suggested by example (10). The relatively high score of *Able/intelligent* highlights the key role of designers as the creative force behind the fashion brand (example 9), particularly when these individuals have high visibility and are very popular within the global fashion community (and beyond). The high scores of *Interested/excited/energetic* and *Happy* show a keen awareness of the importance of attaching positive emotions to fashion brands and evoking pleasurable reactions in consumers, as illustrated in examples 6 and 12, respectively.

On the whole, what emerged from the key semantic domain analysis is that fashion companies aim to do much more than simply expound on the attractive appearance and high quality of their products. Indeed, they seem to use their websites to convey a number of other values relating to notoriety within the fashion community, authenticity of products, and ethical behaviours in order to create a holistic positive image that is perhaps more

aligned with the concerns of modern-day sophisticated consumers of fashion.

4. Concluding remarks

This study has shown how fashion companies use their websites and Facebook pages to convey specific brand-related meanings. Returning to the research questions posed at the outset of the paper, the analysis revealed that, alongside the expected positive evaluations associated with the appearance and quality of fashion products, the companies also communicate other meanings pertaining to social values, including the prestige of the fashion houses/designers, the capacity to trigger positive emotions and feelings among consumers, and an ethical approach to business. Across FWCC, meanings encoding *appreciation* (i.e., aesthetically pleasing or important) were the most prominent, while those encoding *judgement* (i.e., social esteem) and *affect* (emotional reaction) were also present (Martin and White 2005).

The comparison of FWCC to a reference corpus of general American English highlighted some distinctive patterns of usage that appear to be related to the fashion discourse community itself. The two semantic domains with the highest keyness scores could be conceptually aligned with *appreciation*. However, the meanings encoding importance (*Important*) were surprisingly more distinctive than those encoding high quality (*Evaluation: Good*). This suggests that the perception of high status and distinction are of paramount importance to fashion companies. Moreover, these are constructs that are mainly expressed verbally, whereas attractive appearance and quality can also be communicated visually through an effective use of images - one of the affordances of web-based communications which fashion companies typically exploit quite well⁸. A strong effort to engage consumers on an emotional level also emerged from the relatively high keyness score of *Happy*, encoding Martin and White's (2005) *affect*.

⁸ Although images play a key role in fashion brand communication (Siddiqui, O'Malley, McColl, Birtwistle, 2003), their analysis in relation to textual meanings is beyond the scope of this study.

From the follow-up qualitative analysis, another interesting trend surfaced, namely, the combination of different evaluative domains within the same proposition (e.g., *simple* combined with *glamorous* in example 3, *unexpected* combined with *classic* in example 4). This would seem to point to a desire on the part of companies to create a unique “evaluative mix” to distinguish themselves from competitors.

The findings thus suggest that fashion companies use web-based communication strategically, conveying highly nuanced evaluative meanings to evoke desired perceptions of brand identity, i.e., the unique set of meanings that a company defines for its brand and aims to establish in the minds of consumers, as well as brand image, i.e., the attributes that consumers associate with a brand and retain in their memory (Keller, Apéria, Georgson 2008). The findings also corroborate the predominantly transformational nature of the messages communicated by fashion companies on their websites, which aim to appeal to consumers’ self-identity on a psychological level (cf. Hwang, McMillan, Lee 2003).

Finally, from a methodological perspective, the study illustrates how different corpus methods and tools can be synergistically integrated to provide a comprehensive analysis of evaluative meanings in a small specialised corpus.

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