

Title of Paper: Mapping “Good” Fashion Journalism in Australia

Keywords: fashion / journalism / magazine

Abstract

Fashion in Australia has always taken a back seat in the news. With the expanding cultural and economic importance of the fashion industry and lifestyle services within Australia, ‘Mapping “Good” Fashion Journalism in Australia’ aims to identify the current extent and condition of Australian fashion media and create a framework for its improvement.

In a social context the field of study is abundant with information, newsstands are covered with glossy fashion magazines, newspapers flaunt fashion segments, and television shows dictate fashion trends, however, the subject of fashion media is a neglected area of theoretical and empirical study. It is important to identify the market by what fashion media titles exist and how many there are? But there are also ways and means of doing this. This paper will detail these problems and identify what current issues are associated with fashion media and in doing so will produce a map of the Australian fashion media.

This research is part of a PhD study that seeks to map, evaluate and improve the Australian Fashion Media. In this paper, it is the media map, which is discussed in detail. The map includes fashion magazines, news and lifestyle media with fashion segments, imported fashion titles and e-zines. This research represents the first attempt to produce a comprehensive account of the extent of fashion journalism in Australia.

Introduction

The fashion and lifestyle services industries, including fashion media are expanding and growing in cultural and economic significance. Lifestyle journalism, including fashion journalism, is an expanding area of journalistic practice. For a variety of reasons scholarly work on what makes ‘good’ fashion journalism, including standards of professional practice, are under-developed. This paper reports on a current research project, ‘Front Row but Losing the Edge: Mapping, Evaluating and Improving the Australian Fashion Media’. The overall study aims to identify the current extent and condition of Australian fashion journalism and create a framework for its improvement. Front Row but losing the Edge is divided into three sections which together

ask 'what is good fashion journalism in Australia?' First, a map of the Australian fashion media is created. Second, the standard of fashion journalism in these media is evaluated against the established criteria of 'good' journalism. Fashion journalists and editors are also interviewed to obtain their views on what makes 'good' fashion journalism. Third, stakeholders in the fashion industry who also stand as users, readers and consumers, are interviewed to gauge their response to existing fashion journalism and their views on how to lift the industry standards.

In disciplinary terms the project is based firmly in journalism studies. The research design, however, is informed by the established media studies approach to industries, audiences and texts, and the associated qualitative research methods (Cunningham and Turner, 1993). The research design also draws upon recent developments in Creative Industries research, which seek to empirically map those industries which rely heavily upon creative inputs. To the extent that fashion media constitute an important sub-sector within the Creative Industries this study also adds to our knowledge of Creative Industries in Australia by improving the visibility of this sub-sector. This research represents the first attempt to produce a comprehensive account of the extent of fashion media and journalism in Australia.

In this paper, it is the map of Australian fashion media at the core of this research that is discussed in detail. In the first instance the map aims to capture all national and international print and electronic fashion media with an Australian presence. A summarized table is provided which shows the map is comprised of fashion magazines, news and lifestyle media with fashion segments, imported fashion titles and e-zines. International and national fashion media are differentiated to support a sharper focus on Australian fashion media. Examples are discussed to illustrate the different types of fashion media, and scope of fashion journalism.

Origins of fashion media and journalism

Types of magazines that exist on the fashion media market today include elite fashion publications, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, to mass production titles such as *Shop Till You Drop*, street press like *Style* magazine, industry titles including *Ragtrader*, e-zines such as *ZooZoom* and blogs from people such as the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Patty Huntington. There have been many studies done into different titles with *Vogue* as one of the more predominant because of its status as the international standard bearer and trend setter for fashion media and journalism.

Christopher Breward a fashion theorist discusses Thomas Conde Nast's vision for *Vogue's* style when it was first launched under the Conde Nast banner in 1909. "Setting his horizons beyond the more parochial concerns of the old-style woman's magazine, Conde Nast looked to the philosophical and moral ideals of high modernism as a means of energizing the pages of his journal" (Breward 2003, p122). *Vogue's* imagery often centered on Surrealism which allowed readers to draw complex relationships between clothing, identity, image and desirability. This is perhaps the very reason why *Vogue* is one of the most predominant titles worldwide today. *Vogue* knows who it is and *Vogue* knows who its readers are.

Someone else who knew how to position and proposition a successful title is Anne Scott-James, the first Women's Editor of *Picture Post* (1941). The former assistant editor of *Vogue* gave an introduction to her readers stating her intentions as the editor. She explained that her features would cover stories about fashion, beauty, decorations, sewing and knitting, cooking, gardening, ideas for comfort, economy, warmth and pleasure. She goes on to say:

I'd like to stress the words beauty and comfort. Because many people today make a fetish of ugliness and discomfort, under the impression that they are necessary evils of war. Yet, nothing's more untrue. Nothing's more unpractical. Ugliness definitely lowers your morale and discomforts your efficiency (Scott-James 1941, p32).

Scott-James identifies in her readers a need to reconcile their circumstances for their instincts. She sought to answer the business of living and she did.

Today however it seems that even though fashion magazines are not just produced and consumed by women, the word fashion often brings with it a level of skepticism, superficiality and cynicism. Sarah Hoare author of *Talking Fashion* (2002) gives a perfect description of what it means to work in the industry today when she states:

Why does the response 'I'm a fashion editor' induce rolling eyeballs in immigration people, scanning looks from fellow women, and smiles of patronage from chauvinistic business men? Oh, of course: aren't we meant to be a bunch of hysterics screaming Think Pink, and lugging trunks of frocks across exotic landscapes? Sure...but seriously, the fact is that we form part of a global business

which generates a multibillion dollar annual turnover-which happens to be called Fashion.

So what is Fashion? In plain English, it is clothing which lives in the moment. What's the vehicle? It is the fashion magazine, driven by a variety of editors- all exploring, defining and predicting fashion's news in its myriad cultural and social guises. If the essence of fashion lies in novelty through change, then its existence is clinched when a consumer wants to buy it, and this is where a fashion editor comes in. He/she must have the right 'hunches' about which key looks to pick each season, and how best to portray them in photographic form, so that quick imprints spark a reader into wanting to buy before tossing the magazine aside. This compulsion is what keeps fashion alive and fuels its acceleration (Hoare 2002, p1).

This consideration of the origins of fashion media and journalism helps us to identify some of the problems associated with contemporary fashion media and the tensions surrounding the possibility of 'good' fashion journalism. Samantha Grice in her article *Crimes of Fashion* (1996) stated that "many journalists believe the words fashion and journalism don't belong in the same sentence". She goes on to say that "the field often doesn't attract good writers" and "the result is coverage that is heavy on service, press release journalism and thinly disguised advertorial while light on in-depth, well-written stories" (1996). These problems become all the more pressing as the field expands and its economic and social significance grows. According to Frances Bonner:

Australians (and not just women) are renowned as the highest per capita consumers of magazines in the world. In the twelve months to the end of June 2000, 233 million magazines were sold in Australia (McIntyre 2000, p.13). So, far from being unimportant, magazines are both a core part of most people's media consumption practices and an integral part of the media industries in Australia (Bonner 2000, p.188).

With the increasing number of new titles to the changing market it is a priority to establish a framework for evaluating current industry standards for fashion journalism with a view to improving opportunities for continued expansion.

Current Industry Practices

Today new emerging magazines try time and time again to position themselves in a niche space that sees them in no space at all. They end up competing on the newsstands with other magazines that have already established themselves in the same niche. In contrast magazines like *Oyster* and *Curve* that enter the market with a vision that is neither unique nor naïve but perfect in its blend of structure, style and script.

Mapping good fashion journalism starts at the core of the production end of the value chain. By identifying the sites of fashion journalism a clear picture of the fashion media market emerges in Australia. This is in aim of identifying whether the current market is about survival of the fittest or fitness for purpose? Furthermore, by locating current standards of fashion journalism according to industry expectation it will be evident how well 'supply' fits with 'demand' in Australian fashion media and identify areas in need of improvement. As the present situation stands fashion journalism is more often than not considered editorial, and features "girls in bikinis which editors always love" according to Georgina Safe (2007), Fashion Editor of *The Australian*. As Armand Mevis graphic designer of *Another Magazine* stated:

As a reader, I am not really interested in magazines. Week after week, month after month, the popular magazine publishers try to seduce us into buying their wares. The content of what you buy doesn't matter because you buy it to confirm, over and again, what you already know. The same subjects crop up repeatedly in the same magazines. They follow the trivia of the glamorous and famous and keep us informed about what they are up to, where and with whom. A newly published magazine does its best to stand out as unique, but after a few issues, it invariably becomes obvious that the advertisers, not the editors, pull the strings (2002).

By mapping the Australian fashion media market a firm understanding of the stakeholders will be evident as well as avenues in need of improvement. This allows to question whether the market is about 'survival of the fittest' or 'fitness for purpose' by locating individual titles from titles compared with those produced under a parent banner. Also by locating key stakeholders, individuals will be sourced to gauge their opinion on the current standard of Australian Fashion Media in order to locate areas in need of improvement (this will occur in the third stage of the larger project).

Mapping Fashion Media

The first part of this study aims to determine how large the field which contains fashion journalism is. This is achieved by drawing upon recent developments in Creative Industries research which seek to empirically map those industries which rely heavily upon creative inputs. Creative Industries according to the UK Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport are “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS 2001, p.4). Creative Industry fields identified within Australia include writing, publishing and print media, advertising and marketing as well as film, television and radio. These inputs account for the greatest number of fashion media outlets which are the key focus of the Australian Fashion Media map. A survey of various Creative Industries mapping methods reveals two different approaches to mapping techniques. These can be described as the ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ methods of data collection.

An example of ‘top down’ mapping is provided by the ‘Creative Industries National Mapping Project’ coordinated by Peter Higgs (2007). Higgs used an approach that started from large sets of pre-existing national quantitative data to drill down to the sub-sectors which comprise the Creative Industries in Australia. Higgs (2005) used national data sets to identify and “determine more accurately the size and the impact of the employment with the creative industries and of creative talent in other industries.” He did this by examining specific creative fields including those mentioned previously.

A different approach to Creative Industries mapping is provided in Cathy Henkel’s (2000) work on one Creative Industries sub-sector in a specific location. Henkel used a ‘bottom up’ approach to map Screen Industries in Northern New South Wales. The data in this mapping study was collected by a variety of means, including a direct survey of Screen Industries participants in the region to form a picture of a dynamic and rapidly developing Creative Industries cluster.

The mapping of the Australian Fashion Media has elements of both approaches to qualitatively profile a Creative Industries sub-sector. It aims to generate a national picture of fashion media and journalism and so to this extent is ‘top down’. However, the focus on fashion media also necessitates a ‘snowballing’ approach to data collection that is characteristic of the ‘bottom up’ approach to data collection (Henkel, 2000).

The Australian Fashion Media Map

Throughout 2007 an audit of fashion media has been undertaken to generate and collect data on a range of categories including publication title, editor, publishing company and owner, circulation, readership, shelf-life, production schedule, selling agent, price and availability (see Diagram 1).

TITLE	PUBLISHER	PUBLISHED	PARENT CO	EDITOR	ADDRESS	SUBURB	STATE	POST CODE	PHONE	EMAIL	WEBSITE	MEDIUM	CIRC
CLEO	ACP Magazir	ACP Magazir	Australian C	Nedahl Stelio	54 Park St	Sydney	NSW	2000	02 9282 8000	JBarry@acc	www.cleo.n	Fashion Mag	180307
MINK	*	Mink Potentia	Mink Potentia	Monica Kade	Australian T	Eveleigh	NSW	1430	02 9209 4314	monica@mi	www.mink	Online	*
REAL WEDD	Kirsten Mac	Indigo Media Group		Kirsten MacKelden		Sandringham	VIC	3191	03 9686 7429	kirsten@rea	www.realw	Bridal Magazine	
THE AUSTR	News Maga	News Limite	News Limite	Georgina Sa	2 Holt St	Surry Hills	NSW	2010	02 9288 3000	safeg@thea	www.theau	Newspaper	129000
READERSHIP	DEMOGRAPH	CONTENT	PRODUCTION	Newsagent	PRICE	LAUNCHED	QLD	NSW	VIC	WA	SA	NT	TAS
635000	women 18-2	fashion, lifes	Monthly	Newsagent	6.2	1972	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
*	17-30	fashion, mus	QUARTERLY	online	free	2007							
	bridal		BI-ANNUAL	Newsagent	14.95		x	x	x	x	x	x	
437000	men-women 14-50		Weekly-Wed	Newsagent	1.2	Jul-64	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Diagram 1. The Australian Fashion Media Map

The information for this map was collected from various sources with the majority referenced from the National Title Tracker, Gordon and Gotch and Libraries Australia. All forms of Australian fashion media have been included in the data collection effort including magazines (fashion, street press, listings magazines, trade journals), fashion journalism in newspapers, television segments, blogs and e-zines. Data on international magazines which currently circulate in the Australian market was also collated. A total of 649 fashion media outlets were identified in this process (see Table 1).

Types	Australian	International	TOTAL
Number	442	207	649
Example	Vogue Australia	Vogue UK	

Table 1. The Australian Fashion Market

In order to make the data more manageable it was organized into various categories. This enabled the findings to be filtered according the types of media that are not of primary concern to this study without excluding them from the map. As Table 1 indicates, the first filter applied is to differentiate between those fashion media which are Australian, and those which are not. Definitions of 'Australianness' are highly problematic and controversial. Some approaches emphasise the ownership and control status of a media outlet while the emphasis on others is on the question of creative control. The latter approach is the one that has been applied in audiovisual media for the regulatory purpose of deciding what is, and is not Australian content

(for example, Productivity Commission 2000). If key creative positions are occupied by Australians then the product is deemed to be Australian. For example, if “...the producers of the program are Australian (whether or not the program is produced in conjunction with a co-producer, or an executive producer who is not Australian); and either...the directors of the program are Australian or...the writers of the program are Australian”, then the program is deemed to be Australian (Flew 2000, p184). While it is evident that many Australian fashion magazine titles are owned and produced in Australia there are many that blur the lines, for example the *Vogue* brand. Australian *Vogue* while still under the banner of Conde Nast is owned and published by News Magazines a division of News Limited (also foreign-owned). Within a national media sphere ownership is useful to gauging an understanding of how the international and locally-owned media compete on the newsstands. But ownership is not a sufficient basis for understanding the issues of concern to this study. For this reason creative control is taken as the basis for deeming fashion media to be Australian or not. This approach foregrounds the importance of the Australian creative human capital that is invested in Australian fashion media and that shapes the professional practices of the field.

By applying this approach to segregating Australian fashion media by national and imported titles, it is evident that international media account for a third of all of the fashion content available within the country. In order to focus on the question, ‘what is “good” fashion journalism in Australia?’ the Fashion Media deemed to be Australian, are further classified by medium (see Table 2).

Types	Magazine	Newspaper	Television	Internet
Number	333	44	5	8
Example	Curve	The Australian	The Closet Tales of Australian Fashion	Sassy Bella

Table 2. Australian Fashion Media

It is evident that the Australian Fashion Media is not solely comprised of fashion magazines. However, because magazines account for the largest type of fashion media, they attract closer attention in this analysis (see below). In fact there are almost as many fashion magazines on the market as there are fashion segments in newspapers.

A majority of the national newspapers all contain a fashion segment as do most of the local papers. The Australian in particular, not only contains a segment dedicated to fashion every Wednesday by they also feature a fashion lift out eight to ten times a year. Georgina Safe

commented that “influential fashion writers are on newspapers”. This observation clearly identifies why it is so important to take into account the fashion journalism that is produced in newspapers.

Another medium which provides a different account of fashion journalism is television. An image driven focus allows viewers to visually interact with fashion journalism which the pages of a magazine don’t allow. The Closet Tales of Australian Fashion produced the Australia Network and broadcast on the ABC was a behind the scenes look at four Australian fashion designers. Not only is the program about Australian fashion designers but it is produced and consumed by a national audience. This is different to programs with cross-media ownership or creative directorship such as Australia’s Next Top Model which is produced by Granada (UK) and Fashion TV which is produced in Israel despite having an Australian content producer.

Another field which is proving to provide problems for this mapping exercise is the internet due to the open-ended possibilities of World Wide Web publication. The comparatively low barriers to market entry mean that the number of online fashion media can be vastly greater than offline media. Problems of discovery are also potentially of a different order of scale. Trying to locate every online fashion blog, magazine, e-zine, or any other form of content coverage is difficult and for this reason the estimate of 8 Internet-based Australian fashion media indicates the number of prominent online fashion media which are produced and accessed within the national market, but not limited to it.

Through the identification of the Australian Fashion Media it is evident that the field which holds the great number of references to fashion journalism are indeed magazines. It is here that the research returns to this medium to classify the types of magazines which contain fashion segments and that exist on the Australian market (see Table 3).

Types	Fashion	Lifetsyle	Women’s	Men’s	Teen	Photography	Hair	Celebrity	Bridal
Number	60	7	50	56	42	5	3	16	94
Example	Harper’s Bazaar	Frankie	AWW	Ralph	Dolly	Poster	Culture	Famous	Bride To Be

Table 3. Australian Fashion Magazine Types

The types of magazines listed may not necessarily be fashion magazines but they still report on fashion and therefore are a source for fashion journalism. Each title listed for example, clearly

represents its type of magazine by coverage and ownership. The criterion for type based selection originates with the magazine and how they classify themselves. I have limited the search to the categories listed and not expanded to beauty, cosmetic surgery, or sport magazines for example because their coverage pertains to the body and not what goes on the body.

Conclusion

By empirically mapping the field of fashion media in Australia I have also defined it. By locating the context in which fashion journalism is produced and consumed I have built a foundation in which to further develop the area of study and in doing so consider the questions ‘what is “good” fashion journalism?’ and ‘is Australia doing a “good” job?’

This particular field research was limited to a one year time frame for data collection. The study was restricted to identifying the current market. It is here that I must point out that this research is still being developed and the size of the categories demand further exploration. Which leaves the question still to be answered: is the Australian Fashion Media market about survival of the fittest or fitness for purpose? Overall by identifying all of the Australian fashion media we will be able to locate their success within the industry as well as to work out a formula/ structure for the ‘perfect magazine.

Mapping “Good” Fashion Journalism in Australia has clearly identified the extent of fashion media nationally. It has also provided an important benchmark for the longitudinal study of the fashion media. This has been achieved by recognizing a sizable, growing, and dynamic (but neglected, misunderstood and wrongly classified) component of the overall media mix available in Australia. The research will continue to be developed by taking into account the views of stakeholders in both fashion and media contexts, and to identify areas for improvement. Leading on from this research it needs to be considered whether magazines are in fact the predominant medium for fashion journalism or if it is in fact newspapers for example. Eventually it is expected that this research will actually show that the content of fashion journalism outweighs the content of news in all forms of media.

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