
Digital Fashion Competences: Market Practices and Needs during Covid19

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The **Digital Fashion Communication Research Team** is under the Institute of Digital Technologies for Communication at the Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society of USI – Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano, Switzerland.

*Our mission is to investigate online communication as a true human activity, with a long term, comprehensive and holistic approach.
In particular, stressing human growth and quest for meaning in online communication experiences in the fashion domain.*

Website

www.digitalfashion.ch



Executive Summary

This research aims to **assess skills and competences needed in the digital fashion job market** during Covid19 by building on the methodology adopted by Kalbaska and Cantoni (2019) in “Digital Fashion Competences: Market Practices and Needs”.

It presents **a quantitative content analysis of 1397 digital fashion job postings on LinkedIn**. Through the study of job titles and job descriptions, it provides a comprehensive overview of the current market practices and needs in terms of competences required in the digital fashion domain.

The following outcomes were underlined during the analysis:

- **Companies require better trained staff** to work in the field
- **Updated curricula are needed** in the academia, at the vocational level, and within on-the-job trainings
- Despite the pandemic, the digital fashion job market presents a **high number of job positions**
- The fashion job market **is evolving towards an increasingly digital approach**, mostly seeking professional figures capable of managing eCommerce and social media platforms.



Introduction

The fashion industry, similarly to others, has been impacted by ICTs (Sousa et al. 2019) and it is trying to adapt to the digital world by remodelling business processes and systems. These technological advancements are challenging existing ways of conducting business on different levels: (i) they are employed in the production cycle, (ii) they affect marketing, distribution and sales and (iii) they are extensively used in communication activities (Kalbaska and Cantoni, 2019).

The global pandemic Covid-19 is spreading human suffering, disrupting people's lives and damaging the global economy. The fashion industry, with \$2.5 trillion in global annual revenues before the pandemic, has been highly impacted with unemployment and financial hardship. According to the "Coronavirus Update to The State of Fashion 2020" by Business of Fashion et al. (2020), the estimated revenues for the global fashion industry will contract, for apparel and footwear sector, by 30% and for the personal luxury good industry by 39% in 2020. To cope with the damaging impact of the pandemic, fashion companies have been forced to boost the digital adaptation process, transform age-old industry practices that were struggling to become completely digital and adapt to new practices such as social distancing. The pandemic has emphasised a push towards technological investments that has been already announced in recent years: pure fashion-tech players, despite accounting just 17% by numbers, have collected almost half the \$3.7 billion total from initial public offerings (IPOs) in fashion in 2018 to 2019 (Business of Fashion et al. 2019).

Virtual fashion shows, digital show rooms, livestream commerce and 3D design tools are just a few of the technological advancements that companies have been trying to implement in order to overcome the global emergency. Technologies and new processes that have been successfully implemented during this global emergency will change the way fashion companies do business both from a C2C and B2B perspective and they will have a major impact on the future of the industry (Business of Fashion et al. 2020).

In order to respond to the changes that are emerging in the fashion industry, an evolution of the workforce is also needed. New professional roles, that combine fashion and ICTs skills, are required in this new panorama, yet companies still struggle to find the right employees with the appropriate skill set. According to "The State of Skills in the Apparel Industry" by Alvanon et al. (2018) two main issues arise from searching employees with the appropriate digital fashion skills. From one hand, companies are disclosing a shortage of workforce that master the appropriate competences and there is the concern that graduates are not equipped with the right set of skills. This underlines the importance of having academic curricula continuously updated in order to train future professionals with the relevant competences. On the other hand, the rapid pace of business and technology advancements are challenging the competences of companies' workforce, who need to keep up with the required skill set. In this direction, according to the "LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2020" by LinkedIn Learning (2020), 79% percent of executives worldwide are concerned that a lack of essential skills in their workforce is threatening the future growth of their organisation and 51% of talent developers plan to launch upskilling programs in 2020.

While a growing awareness is emerging regarding the importance of hedging the digital fashion skill gap, few studies have focused on the competences and skills needed in the current fashion job market. This research aims to assess digital fashion market practices and needs during Covid19 emergency. In particular, this study will answer the following research questions:

- ***What are the specific job roles within digital fashion domain in the current marketplace, which is undergoing a critical transformation due to Covid19?***
- ***What are the skills and competences needed today in the digital fashion domain?***



Methodology

Digital fashion related job postings were analysed through LinkedIn, a business and employment oriented social networking service (SNS). LinkedIn is the most popular SNS with 675 million users around the world, of which 211 million in Europe. It operates in 24 different languages and gathers 30 million companies around the world (Cooper, 2020).

The crawling of available digital fashion jobs was carried out in 29 countries, including 28 European Union countries and Switzerland. The data analysis was undertaken during a two-week period from 19.05.2020 to 02.06.2020.

The research on LinkedIn was conducted following the methodology by Kalbaska and Cantoni (2019). The final list of keywords includes: 3D, Augmented Reality, CRM, Digital Communication, Digital Content, Digital Fashion, Digital Marketing, Digital Media, Digital Transformation, eCommerce, eLearning, Fashion IT, Forecasting, Influencer Marketing, Localisation, Personalisation, SEO/SEM, Social Media, Trade Marketing, Usability, User Experience, Visual Merchandising, Web Analytics. The following industries were taken into consideration: Apparel and Fashion, Internet, Luxury Goods and Jewellery, Marketing and Advertising, Retail, Textile and Design.

The job posting attributes taken into consideration were: job title, company name, location, publication date of the advert, job description, industry the job belongs to. Only job postings in English were analysed.

In the data-cleaning phase, an automatic separation of English job postings from other languages was undergone along with an automatic separation of EU countries and Switzerland job offers from EMEA countries.

A second phase of the data cleaning consisted in a manual separation of duplicates and an accurate selection of fashion related job offerings. Job postings published twice by the fashion brand itself and by an HR company were taken into consideration only once. Job postings that did not contain the word “fashion” in the job title or in the job description were removed. Finally, job offerings that contained the word “fashion” only in the job description were further analysed for relevancy.

The analysis of digital fashion related job postings on LinkedIn conducted in 28 EU countries and in Switzerland resulted in 1397 job postings. Quantitative content analysis of job titles and job descriptions was then performed using Word Smith Tool 6.

Results

The results are presented in the subsequent sections: (a) number of available job positions in every country, (b) analysis of available job titles in the digital fashion domain and (c) analysis of the digital fashion skills extracted from the job descriptions.

a. Available jobs in the digital fashion domain

The research of open digital fashion job positions on LinkedIn produced results in 25 EU countries and Switzerland. No job positions were found in the Republic of Cyprus, Latvia and Malta. Table 1 presents the list of countries where digital fashion positions were advertised on LinkedIn during the period of the data collection (from 19.05.2020 to 02.06.2020) with the related number of available job positions.

Countries	Frequencies	%	Countries	Frequencies	%
Austria	11	0,8%	Italy	86	6,2%
Belgium	34	2,4%	Lithuania	6	0,4%
Bulgaria	1	0,1%	Luxembourg	3	0,2%
Croatia	1	0,1%	Netherlands	85	6,1%
Czech Republic	2	0,1%	Poland	17	1,2%
Denmark	12	0,9%	Portugal	67	4,8%
Estonia	1	0,1%	Romania	5	0,4%
Finland	10	0,7%	Slovakia	2	0,1%
France	44	3,1%	Slovenia	1	0,1%
Germany	203	14,5%	Spain	44	3,1%
Greece	5	0,4%	Sweden	23	1,6%
Hungary	6	0,4%	Switzerland	82	5,9%
Ireland	17	1,2%	United Kingdom	629	45,0%
			Total	1'397	100,0%

Table 1. Number and percentual of digital fashion jobs

These results should be carefully evaluated due to the fact that the analysis was undertaken on the dataset in English. This might have had an impact on the number of available job positions since national languages of countries were not taken into consideration.

The hubs of the digital fashion domain today in Europe are the United Kingdom (629) and Germany (203) followed by Italy (86), the Netherlands (85) and Switzerland (82). Finally, Portugal (67), Spain (44) and France (44) also present a consistent number of job offerings in English.

b. Digital fashion related job titles

Quantitative content analysis was performed in order to understand and evaluate specific job titles that are on request in the current job market within the digital fashion domain. Table 2 presents a list of the most frequent combinations of keywords found in digital fashion job titles.

Keywords combinations	#
eCommerce	55
Digital marketing	49
Visual associate	44
Product manager	41
Social media	41
Marketing manager	39
Sales associate	38
Sales consultant	35
Store manager	31
Customer service	30
Fashion assistant	27
Manager digital	25
Account manager	23
Graphic designer	21
Business development	20
Manager senior	20
eCommerce manager	16
Sales manager	15
Influencer marketing	14
Visual merchandiser	14

Table 2. Digital fashion job titles

The results show the most frequent combinations of words in job titles. eCommerce (55), digital marketing (49) and social media (41) are the three most desired areas of jobs, while visual associate (44), product manager (41), marketing manager (39), sales associate (38), sale consultant (35) and store manager (31) are the most desired job professions.

c. Digital fashion skills

The last set of data concerns digital fashion skills and competences analysed through a quantitative content analysis of job descriptions.

Table 3 presents the list of the most frequent combinations of keywords found in the job descriptions of digital fashion job postings.

Keywords combinations	#
Social media	738
Customer service/care	699
eCommerce	554
Communication skills	520
Digital marketing	421
Team player	282
Customer/user experience	234
Visual merchandising	229
Problem solving	188
Luxury fashion	182
Project management	180
Google analytics (including Web Analytics)	172
Fashion industry	149
Store manager	146
Management skills	141
Verbal communication	123
Paid social	110
Analytical skills	109
Data driven	109
Fashion trends	99

Table 3. Digital fashion skills

The first required competence today in the digital fashion domain is “social media”. The ability to manage, promote and analyse social media accounts (738) occupies the first position in terms of the repetition of combination of keywords in the database. Such result is not surprising as ICTs are extensively used in communication activities and they are shaping the way fashion brands communicate with customers. Fashion brands utilize social media channels to interact with customers, promote their products or services and analyse consumers’ behaviour, preferences and needs. Indeed, related to social media, not only the ability to manage contents but also the ability to analyse and promote social media accounts is required. The ability to promote specific content on social media through paid ads (110) is a specific skill required today in the job market.

The high request of customer service/care skills (699) and the ability to understand and analyse customer experiences (234) during the customer journey represents an increasing interest by fashion brands in moving towards a customer-centered approach. In some job areas (for example social media and e-commerce) it is required, in addition to the skills

relevant to the specific area, an accurate knowledge of customers and the ability to manage problems that may occur during the relationship with them.

The third most frequent keywords combination is e-Commerce (554). Experience or knowledge of digital marketing (421) and e-commerce is required in order to manage, improve and analyse related activities. Communication skills (730), meant in its broad meaning (520) or specifically to verbal (123) and written (87) communication skills, are highly requested and result as the most important soft skill cited by recruiters. Strong, excellent and good are the keywords most frequently paired with communication abilities and this symbolises the importance of mastering such skills in the digital fashion domain.

Other soft skills are mentioned within the general name of analytical skills (109), in particular the highest ranked one is the ability to work well in team (282) followed by problem solving skills (188) and the ability to learn by doing. In the current digital fashion job market, recruiters also frequently ask new employees to master management skills (141) in particular project management (180) and time management skills. Despite the push towards digitalization, emphasized by Covid19 social distancing, skills related to the management of physical stores are still requested. Employers are looking for professionals able to manage stores (146) as well as the ability to convey a consistent brand identity through visual merchandising (229) techniques in stores. Finally, new professional figures in the digital fashion job market not only need to understand and be passionate about fashion industry (149) and luxury fashion (182) sectors but also be able to manage large amount of data in order to predict future market trends and meet customer demand. Many recruiters, indeed, demand a data driven (109) approach and future employees able to master specific tools such as Google analytics (172) or social media insights (mainly Facebook, Instagram and YouTube analytics) in order to study and forecast future fashion trends (99).

Conclusions

The search for skills and competences in the digital fashion job market represents a very important issue due to the fast development of ICTs and the dynamic nature of the fashion field. Companies in the field need to continuously adapt in order to stay relevant and competitive. This requires a continuous update of skills.

This research will help to acknowledge and evaluate the current situation concerning market practices and needs in the digital fashion domain and it will have a practical impact for professionals in the recruitment departments as well as professionals in charge of workforce training activities within fashion brands. Moreover, this study may also help fashion educators that need to constantly update their academic programs in order to be aligned with market needs. In this way, with the constant update of competences and skills, digital fashion education and training can enhance the ability of their learners and increase their efficiency in the digital fashion domain.

This study has some limitations, which could be addressed by future research. Firstly, this research utilized a single platform, LinkedIn social networking service, hence the results of this sample of analysis should be carefully generalized.

Moreover, it focused only on job postings published in English and did not consider all the ones published in other European languages.



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