

# Dior and Cinematic Art: The Aesthetic Deconstruction and Cultural Significance of Fashion Film Narratives

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## Abstract

Movies have witnessed a growing diversity in their content, form, and means of expression. This diversity has shattered the confines of traditional mainstream cinema, transforming the medium into a vehicle for capital operations and brand marketing. Fashion has adeptly employed the cinematic realm to foster communication between fashion brands and their audiences, effectively bridging the gap between the public and the world of fashion through unique storytelling techniques.

In this article, we will use Christian Dior as a case study, delving into specific films as the starting point for our discussion. We will explore how storytelling methods play a pivotal role in brand building, thereby demonstrating that the narrative employed in fashion films is a crucial tool for brand development and a novel avenue for fashion communication. Simultaneously, this audio-visual narrative facilitates direct emotional connections between the fashion world and its audience.

**Keywords:** fashion films, storytelling, Christian Dior, communication

## 1. Introduction

Since the inception of Harper's Bazaar in the mid-nineteenth century, magazines were the dominant vehicle for the conveyance of fashion information for over a century. Fashion magazines, renowned for their highly specialized content, served as the perfect platform for brands to showcase their advertisements (Menéndez-Menédez, 2009). Consequently, the era of fashion predominantly governed by magazines has not yielded to the advent of audio-visual media such as movies and television.

It wasn't until the 1990s, "The digital revolution has transformed all media, formats and supports of the traditional communication sector without distinction, promoting the appearance of new content and new ways of telling stories (Jódar Marín, 2019, pp. 137)." Influenced by the digital revolution, fashion movies have emerged as a novel form of brand communication. Brands have increasingly eschewed traditional publicity models and, instead, employed movies to present brand content to the public, highlighting the aesthetics inherent in the conveyed brand information.

The convergence of fashion and movies is not a recent development. Film and fashion domains have been closely linked since the advent of audio-visual art. Only in recent times has a distinct film genre known as "fashion film" emerged. In general terms, "the contemporary fashion film has principally been motivated by the kinetic and metamorphic possibilities of dress and adornment" (Uhlirova, 2013, pp. 139). Building upon this foundation, these films have established their own distinctive set of narrative principles.

In recent years, fashion has transcended its reliance on visual art as a mere promotional tool and has transformed it into a channel for brand marketing. An increasing number of fashion brands are utilizing movies as a means of audio-visual expression for their brand communication. Examples of such films include *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), *Marc Jacobs & Louis Vuitton* (2007), *Valentino: The Last Emperor* (2008), *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky*

(2009), *Yves Saint Laurent* (2014), *House of Gucci* (2021), and many others. Fashion movies astutely blend audio-visual art with clothing design and brand narratives, setting a precedent for the amalgamation of diverse artistic languages within the fashion industry.

However, the fusion of fashion and cinema not only provides a conduit for brand promotion but also disrupts the centuries-old top-down communication hierarchy of the fashion world. Georg Simmel posited that fashion, on one hand, leads to the differentiation of social relationships, and on the other, it serves as an assertion of individual identity. With the involvement of cinematic media, the public not only gains swift access to elite fashion brands but, simultaneously, through cinematic storytelling, fashion ceases to be the exclusive purview of the privileged and becomes an imaginative realm accessible to all. In this audio-visual realm, fashion has a novel emotional element. While facilitating communication between brands and consumers, the films also forge a connection between people and fashion itself. Under the persuasive influence of cinema, as the public rushes to emulate the trends set by these movies, everyone is endowed with an equal right to pursue fashion. Consequently, “fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency toward social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change” (Simmel, 1957, pp. 543). Fashion has become a medium for the masses to express their emotions.

In this context, this article endeavors to scrutinize fashion film works, using the Christian Dior brand as an illustrative example. The objective is to dissect the distinctive narrative mode engendered by the fusion of film and fashion branding as it catalyzes a novel dissemination of fashion. We will see how, under the influence of the film’s unique audio-visual language, the public establishes a personal connection with the fashion brand and, through the audio-visual narrative, reinterprets the brand’s various values, kindling the emotional aspirations of the public.

## 2. Literature Review: The Interplay of Film and Fashion

When examining the evolution of film, it becomes challenging to pinpoint the first fashion film, since fashion has played a role in cinema since the latter was invented. Clothing has always been a key element of cinematic narratives, and movies have always been a major disseminator of fashion trends. Film, as an art, forges emotional connections between viewers and the characters on screen (Stam, 2017), and the characters’ attire hugely informs the public’s sense of their identity. In turn, the audience walks out of the cinema deeply influenced by the fashion imagery they have been shown. Since the early 20th century, the clothing seen in films was shown to ignite market trends. Fashion’s place in film was symbiotic: “It is the perfect place to stay, it is going to be the best, it is going to be great” (Peisajovich, 2022, pp. 87).

Fashion film. It can be defined as a manifestation of brand content (Del Pino & Castelló, 2015) and a product of the behavioral response of 21st-century consumers to the digital revolution. According to Mijovic, we can perceive fashion cinema as “having inherited the principles of traditional fashion media – it celebrates fashion for its ceaseless creative energy, conceptual and artisanal qualities, its transformative potential in the realm of social identity, and as a means of individual expression” (Mijovic, 2013, pp. 183).

It is indeed due to its incorporation into mainstream film narratives that fashion is no longer the exclusive domain of the elite. Fashion used to be a concern and privilege only of the very rich; but movies put it into the hearts and minds of everyday people. The fashion industry has astutely leveraged the impact that film has on public perception; Values such as idealism, freedom, class transcendence, women’s empowerment, and rebellion have all been marketed to consumers by fashion brands via film (Tesoriere, 2021, pp. 236).

Fashion films aim to connect with consumers in an informative manner while stimulating desire through emotional value (Tesoriere, 2021, pp. 236). Tur y Segarra asserted that storytelling entails the use of sophisticated tools, such as branded content products, not with the objective of convincing the audience of the product’s advantages but to establish an emotional connection - forging an emotional bond and ensuring brand loyalty (2014, pp. 120).

The ascendancy of fashion films not only propels brand development but also diminishes the divide between the public and the world of fashion. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of numerous academic scholars from diverse fields such as advertising, marketing, and aesthetics. However, few have embarked on in-depth academic investigations starting from specific films and delving into a particular brand from the vantage point of communication studies. Consequently, this research holds practical significance and scholarly value for the broader academic community.

## 3. Materials and Methods

The principal objective of this article is to elucidate the role of movies as a burgeoning media platform in sculpting the identity of the Christian Dior brand. This entails an in-depth analysis to affirm the precise functions and

contributions of movies in the brand-building endeavor. To attain this goal, a hybrid qualitative approach is adopted in this study.

### 3.1 Corpus Selection

Our primary focus in selecting the corpus is centered on the genre of Fashion Film, with a particular emphasis on movies featuring Christian Dior. It is evident that Dior's fashion has frequently made appearances in the world of cinema. Based on our statistical analysis, we have identified 9 movies that prominently feature Dior clothing, including titles *Stage Fright* (1950), *Indiscreet* (1958), *The Pink Panther* (1963), *Paris When It Sizzles* (1964), *A Countess from Hong Kong* (1967), *L'Ours et la poupée* (1971), *Anna Karenina* (2012), *Los Abrazos Rotos* (2009), *Diana* (2013). Additionally, Christian Dior has actively utilized micro-films as a form of advertising. One notable example is the release of *Secret Garden* in 2012, which garnered significant attention in the fashion industry and beyond. Nonetheless, the majority of films do not primarily emphasize the narrative of the Christian Dior brand. Instead, they tend to incorporate Dior clothing as an auxiliary element within the storyline or as a means to elevate the overall aesthetic of the film. In the realm of advertising through film, the focus typically remains on utilizing audio-visual language to visually showcase product design. Out of this extensive selection, only three movies have been created based on the storyline of the Dior brand itself. As a result, this study has narrowed its focus to the three most emblematic films within the period spanning from 2000 to 2023. The pertinent information about these selected films is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Films based on Dior brand itself

Film	Year	Director
Dior and I	2014	Frédéric Tcheng
Haute couture	2021	Sylvie Ohayon
Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris	2022	Anthony Fabian

### 3.2 Analysis of Movie Content

In a broader context, "Content Analysis is defined as the systematic examination of the content of communication, delving into the meanings, contexts, and intentions encapsulated within the messages" (Prasad, 2005, pp. 1). Content analysis has been a valuable approach in the field of cinema, with scholars exploring various social issues, including but not limited to women's rights, sexuality, public health, and violence, by scrutinizing the content of films (Head, 1952; Lowry, 1989; Olson, 1994). Notably, since the 1970s, American scholars have delved into the professionalization of interpretive film analysis, dissecting films from multiple angles, encompassing both aesthetic and semiotic dimensions (Zavala, 2010).

In this paper, to dissect the process of crafting the Christian Dior brand within the realm of cinema, we have opted to commence with a content analysis approach to scrutinize films. This method allows for an exploration of the intrinsic relationship between the narrative strategies employed in the films and their connection to Christian Dior. Furthermore, it serves to unravel the underlying objectives of fashion films. Through the examination of specific case studies, this paper aims to elucidate how the portrayal of Christian Dior in movies impacts society by wielding influence within the fashion domain.

## 4. Results

Following the analysis of the three films, it becomes evident that Christian Dior has utilized diverse narrative approaches to shape an image of the brand as a realm of emotional and fashionable sophistication. All three films leverage Dior's exquisite haute couture as a backdrop to unfold their respective narratives. In *Dior and I*, the story unfolds as a documentary, chronicling designer Raf Simons' journey in creating his first haute couture collection after assuming the helm at Dior. *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris* narrates the story of Mrs. Harris, a cleaning lady in London, who embarks on an extraordinary journey of acquiring and wearing a Dior haute couture dress. Lastly, in *Haute Couture*, the film weaves a narrative around the relationship between Dior's head dressmaker, Esther, and a young girl named Jade. With Esther's guidance, Jade undergoes a transformation, discovering her self-worth within the high fashion world after initially feeling lost and uncertain.

Upon a comprehensive examination of the movie plots, a significant common thread emerges: Dior Haute Couture serves as the linchpin propelling the narrative forward. Utilizing the audio-visual language of cinema, these films

construct a novel fashion image and imbue the brand with distinct values. Simultaneously, they challenge and reshape the public's preconceived notions about fashion, transcending the confines of traditional communication models reliant solely on words, pictures, and text.

The emotions conveyed by the characters on screen become a response to the emotional desires of the viewing audience. Through the cinematic medium, the public vicariously experiences the allure of high-end customization and is immersed in a realm of fashion mythology.

This section of the study delves into the specific narratives of the films, elucidating how Christian Dior meticulously shapes the brand's image and establishes a mechanism for generating meaning within the cinematic context. We also explore how these films facilitate the establishment of an emotional connection between fashion and the audience, ultimately culminating in the popularization of high-end bespoke fashion.

#### *4.1 Film Narratives and Brand Establishment*

In general discourse, Christian Dior is intrinsically linked with notions of female elegance. This association has been cultivated over the years through the omnipresence of fashion shows and diverse advertising campaigns. As a result, the significance of Dior clothing has transcended its functional utility, evolving into a potent symbol that carries profound meaning.

Christian Dior is frequently regarded as a quintessentially French brand that embodies the aesthetic and fashionable sensibilities of the Parisian upper class. This segment of society serves as the archetype of aristocracy in French culture. Christian Dior, in crafting its brand narrative, draws from the opulent lifestyles of this prosperous social class, seamlessly fusing the public's aspirations for such a refined existence with the brand's symbolic essence.

The advent of digital media and the rise of audio-visual art have significantly reshaped the dynamics and overall connection between brands and consumers, ushering in a transformation in brand communication. In this era, movie images have assumed the role of direct conduits for disseminating information. Dior's exquisite haute couture is swiftly and vividly conveyed through these visual representations, with the dynamic evolution of characters seamlessly showcasing the inherent beauty of the clothing.

These three films feature Dior fashion shows from distinct eras. The film narratives are set against the backdrop of three different Dior designers, each hailing from a different social milieu. Consequently, each presents a unique style.

In the film where Mrs. Harris ventures into Paris, the storyline transports us back to the era when Mr. Christian Dior, the brand's founder, was at the helm. As a result, the garments showcased in the film are characterized by vibrant hues and intricate embellishments, reflecting a traditional feminine temperament synonymous with elegance, virtue, and nobility. Prominently featured outfits throughout the film include the purple embroidered gown (Figure 1) initially glimpsed by Mrs. Harris during her cleaning duties, the custom-made green gown (Figure 2) in Paris, and the red Dior gown (Figure 3) she ultimately acquires. Although these dresses exhibit varying styles and color palettes, collectively, their sumptuous designs and Mrs. Harris's yearning for these garments serve as symbolic representations of luxury and elegance. The clothing in the film transcends mere fabric and threads, becoming emblematic of Mrs. Harris's cherished dreams. The entire film revolves around Mrs. Harris's relentless pursuit of her deepest-held aspiration: acquiring a Dior dress.



Figure 1. The gown that initially catches Mrs. Harris' eye at the Dior fashion house.



Figure 2. The custom-made green gown in Paris





Figure 3. The red Dior gown Mrs. Harris ultimately acquires

In the film, Mrs. Harris, working as a cleaner, embodies the working class. She stands at a considerable distance from Dior, a brand specializing in high-end customizations for the elite. However, her entry into the Fashion Show, a symbol of aristocratic society, signifies her initiation of breaking down the social barriers of the fashion world. This act paves the way for the general public to access fashion on an equal footing, underscoring the importance of fashion's democratization.

This narrative also resonates with the subplot where Mrs. Harris, courageously leading a group of workers, proposes reforms to Mr. Dior upon learning of the fashion house's challenges. The underlying message is clear: fashion should not exclusively cater to aristocratic society but should be accessible to all. It ought to be open to the public, with everyone having the right to savor and pursue beauty.

The narrative of *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris* unfolds within the era of Mr. Christian Dior, whereas Haute couture surrounds Dior's chief tailor's final fashion show before retirement. The bulk of each story takes place in starkly contrasting settings – in one case, the outskirts of Paris slums, and in the other, the heart of Paris within the Dior fashion house. Through the medium of film, these seemingly disparate social scenes are skillfully interwoven into a cohesive narrative.

Jade, who resides at the social margins, secures a position at Dior with Esther's guidance. Within the fashion house, Jade faces ostracism from her colleagues due to her background. Nonetheless, her entry serves to underscore that the world of fashion knows no boundaries of race or class. The film effectively conveys the Christian Dior brand's commitment to inclusivity, shaping its identity and fostering a sense of equality.

Simultaneously, in this film, Dior's skilled tailors consistently underscore the brand's precision and exquisite craftsmanship while emphasizing the concept of continuity in Dior clothing. Throughout the entire movie, whether it's the ready-to-wear garments showcased in the fashion house or the culminating fashion show, these high-end bespoke creations predominantly feature light colors and white. In comparison to the other two films, this movie opts for a simpler color palette in the costumes. However, clothing remains a pivotal element of the film's visual language, perpetually serving the narrative.

The color white, in particular, assumes a significant role, representing purity and enchantment. Within Dior's fashion house, the use of white signifies Jade's inherent kindness and innocence, weaving a captivating dream of purity that the Dior brand meticulously crafts for women.



Figure 4. The white gown in film *Haute Couture*

In the case of the film *Dior and I*, the entire narrative unfolds as a documentary, capturing the preparations of designer Raf for an upcoming fashion show. The film beautifully encapsulates Raf's transformative impact on the brand by showcasing his alterations in color, fabric, and garment shapes upon assuming his role. His arrival breathed a fresh atmosphere into the Dior brand, ingeniously blending artistry with fashion.

During the climactic fashion presentation within the film, Raf's designs managed to preserve the brand's inherent elegance while effecting a shift from ornate to simplicity. This shift made Dior more attuned to the contemporary woman's desire for practical aesthetics. The clothing he envisioned shed superfluous surface adornments, emphasizing modern, uncluttered silhouettes. Raf introduced a distinct fashion style distinct from its predecessors, thereby accentuating the shifts in contemporary women's aesthetic sensibilities and propelling a novel fashion concept and cultural trend in clothing.



Figure 5. The gowns in film *Dior and I*

Across these three films, Dior's haute couture serves as a pivotal narrative thread. Repeatedly, the films take us behind the scenes of Dior's fashion house, demystifying the world of high-end fashion and affording the audience an intuitive glimpse into the intricate process of crafting exquisite garments.

As a fashion brand, Christian Dior is represented in the movies predominantly through the clothing of different eras, each encapsulating the brand's distinct ideas and concepts of its respective period. These diverse ensembles progressively shape a unique brand identity within the narrative of each specific film. This progression marks a significant shift in fashion, making it accessible to a broader public beyond the confines of the upper class. It underscores the remarkable inclusivity and adaptability of fashion.

The three films deploy fashion as a narrative device to convey the brand's concepts and image to the audience. From a semiotic perspective, haute couture emerges as the fundamental unit within the ideographic system - a symbol. When integrated into a particular film narrative, it begins to assume specific meanings, making the clothing representative of more than just itself. However, this journey from mere clothing to a symbol carrying meaning is a complex one. Dior has successfully assimilated traditional French art and culture, drawing from mythological narratives to internalize the French way of life and spirit, ultimately establishing itself as the core of the brand.

The myth, as Barthes pointed out, cannot be reduced to a mere object, concept, or idea; rather, it represents a mode of imbuing meaning (Barthes, 1999). Dior employs the medium of film narratives to craft myths, elevate brand worth, and disseminate the ever-evolving core tenets of the brand. Fashion is no longer the exclusive domain of the elite, as the brand adeptly adopts storytelling techniques to transform Dior into an ethereal realm that encapsulates the myriad enchanting visions of women. "Storytelling is an effective communication tool because it is, in essence, an extension of a fundamental human trait—narration—applied to the realm of marketing" (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016, pp. 53).

The construction of brand myths is intrinsically tied to the narrative journey of fashion films. Within this process, the brand leverages the power of imagery to convey meaning. Dior employs symbols and fashion itself as conduits for imparting its essence. The underlying core brand concepts are concurrently elucidated through visual storytelling, facilitating the external transmission of meaning.

#### 4.2 Branding Through Emotional Connection in Film

Film is a medium that manifests the visual experience, employing audio-visual language and the screen to immerse the audience in an environment closely resembling reality while imparting profound emotional connotations. It is within this context that the audience embarks on a journey into an imaginative realm, experiencing the environment and atmosphere crafted by the film's narrative as if it were real, while also partaking in the emotional exchanges between the characters and the audience.

From this vantage point, movies harness the art of storytelling and utilize audio-visual elements to construct a dreamscape for the audience. Through this process of representation, film constructs a simulated reality, a form of representation in itself. Hall posits that if the media can successfully transform its representation of the world into an acknowledged depiction of reality, it wields considerable societal influence (Hall, 2005). This influence is inherently embedded in ideology, establishing a framework that subtly permeates, regulates, and influences those within it, progressively internalizing these representations into the collective consciousness as truth. In essence, movies employ imagery to guide the public, shaping the audience's imagination under the powerful influence of these images.

Christian Dior utilizes film narratives to foster a deep sense of brand identification among the audience, effectively shaping the brand's image. Through the amalgamation of characters in the film and the audience, the brand permeates and exerts its influence on the collective consciousness. In the movie *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*, Dior's garments evolve into symbols of nobility, elegance, and beauty, while Mrs. Harris's character embodies the struggles of many individuals at the lower rungs of society. By the film's conclusion, when Mrs. Harris graces the veterans' ball adorned in Dior Haute Couture, these emblems of upper-class society become accessible to ordinary people, affirming the burgeoning trend of democratized fashion. At this juncture, Dior haute couture takes on a new significance; it transcends being a mere tangible garment, transforming into an intangible vehicle for erasing class distinctions. As the film unfolds, Dior's brand image deepens, attracting the public's appraisal of the clothing through the imaginative space sculpted by the imagery, thus shaping the brand in the public's consciousness.

The film weaves an imaginary yet tangible realm through the audience's reactions to the images. While the brand's meaning crafted by Dior remains intangible, the audience undergoes an emotional journey when watching the movie. As previously articulated by Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, movies gratify the primal



desire for visual delight (Mulvey, 2013). Audiences also experience the visual pleasure of self-identification while viewing these films. Movies construct a tapestry of imagination, recognition/misrecognition, and identity through the medium of images. In this regard, it is through images that the initial formation of the “self” and the matrix of subjectivity take shape (Mulvey, 2013). With these unique attributes, fashion movies offer the media foundation for Dior’s communication strategy, subverting the traditional approach to fashion communication—from passively disseminating fashion information in magazines to actively engaging in communication through images that resonate with the audience’s emotions.

In the broader context, fashion and luxury goods are often synonymous with the power of seduction (Lipovetsky, 1990). Dior adeptly leverages the advantages of film and the seductive potential it offers. In the films *Haute Couture* and *Dior and I*, there is a deliberate restraint in showcasing the opulence of haute couture. Instead, the films are set against the backdrop of the Dior fashion house, with a more profound focus on the inner workings of the establishment. Here, Dior’s emphasis extends beyond mere fashion sales and delves deeper into nurturing the brand’s image. “In fact, fashion films serve as a contemporary substitute for creating a brand’s image through the retail experience” (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016, pp. 48).

In these two films, the stories unfolding within the Dior fashion house feature the brand’s designers and tailors as central characters, forging emotional connections with both real and potential consumers in the audience. The movies seamlessly guide the audience through the process of high-end customization in an intuitive manner. They do not excessively highlight clothing products or prominently showcase brand logos. Instead, they meticulously depict the details of high-end garments, from weaving techniques to fabric selection and color coordination. Dior’s choice of this approach allows the public to perceive their clothing as not merely garments but rather as intricately crafted pieces brimming with beauty and nuance. This portrayal of the garment manufacturing process does not instill a sense of marketing driven by the brand, but rather imparts a sense of freshness linked to high-end customization and the embodiment of a refined French lifestyle.

Building on this foundation, Dior adeptly employs film narratives to underscore the brand’s humane dimension. In the realm of high-end customization depicted in the films, subjects like inheritance, familial affection, and love are broached. All of these emotional facets are woven into the fabric of the Dior fashion house, breathing new vitality and meaning into the brand, emotionally resonating with the audience. “The aim is to appeal to the viewer’s imagination and desire, not to persuade with rational arguments about product convenience” (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016, pp. 52). For instance, in the film, the character of Jade represents the underprivileged segments of Parisian society, and Jade’s friends symbolize a diversity of individuals residing in Paris, hailing from various countries, nationalities, and belief systems. When Esther sustains an injury, Jade’s gay friends exemplify the kindness and support shown by marginalized communities in society. This narrative technique employed by Dior communicates not only the brand’s identity as a high-end customization label but also its commitment to women of diverse backgrounds, the underprivileged, and marginalized groups.

## 5. Conclusion

The fusion of fashion and film represents not just a new cinematic genre, but a groundbreaking brand communication strategy. Fashion films expertly weave Dior’s brand narrative into their plots, translating it into the universal language of audio-visual storytelling. In this process, Dior acquires a significance that transcends mere materiality, evolving from a symbol of aristocracy to a beacon of popularized fashion.

When audiences engage with these fashion films, the narratives construct a captivating and immersive realm, enabling viewers to forge emotional connections with the characters on screen. The seductive power demonstrated by Dior through film enhances the brand’s identity, fostering the formation of visual experiences and unique visual identities for the audience.

In essence, Dior harnesses the art of film to convey a message of fashionable inclusivity and a genuine connection with the audience’s emotions. Fashion films provide Christian Dior with a novel approach to brand development. While showcasing the exquisite elegance of French fashion, they also convey empathy and consideration for the broader public.

In summary, the emotional depth conveyed by brands in these film narratives resonates deeply with audiences, exemplifying the powerful synergy between fashion and film in shaping a brand’s identity and its connection with the public.

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