

VANESSA DE JESUS
OCTOBER 2024



LOSING FOCUS: HOW FOCUS, FLOW, AND DEEP WORK IMPACT TODAY'S FASHION INDUSTRY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today's design industry, more specifically the fashion industry, we as a society are not as interested in fashion and their concepts as we were in the past. This is largely due to growing social media addiction and difficulties maintaining attention, focus, and flow. In this paper, I will address differences of how we consumed fashion in the past versus today, and how we can increase the awareness of fashion around the world by enhancing our attention and focus as a society.

In a world that over-consumes technology daily, finding individuals really interested in fashion can be difficult. Today, fashion is mainly consumed through social media, as is everything else in the world. According to an article made by Gitnux, in 2020, 44 percent of US adults read magazines in digital formats. Also from Gitnux, magazine sales revenue are expected to decrease at a rate of -5.71 percent annually from 2023 to 2027. This goes to show how the digital world is continuing to impact the magazine and design industries, both in a pretty negative way. By improving our attention and focus, we can look deeper into the fashion world, and begin to understand various artists and designers in newer and more interesting ways. Designers may also find the motivation to continue their work, as many today give up their dreams due to no exposure to their work - which can eventually leave us with no fashion or art to look at!

In order to get others to properly acknowledge fashion similarly to how humans did in the past, it is important to understand the importance of focus, flow, and deep work to challenge social media addiction among young adults, and also improve one's interpretation on various works.



INTRODUCTION

As the use of digital media and technology increases, the work of various designers and artists go unseen. According to research, there is a very obvious decline in reading in America - one of the main ways fashion was consumed in the past. This decline can largely be attributed to the overuse of social media and technology, and can largely impact our views and perceptions of the fashion itself. Overall, fashion is not consumed today as it was in the past, and difficulties with attention and focus can largely impact designers' work and willingness to be in the fashion industry. We consume fashion very differently today than from the past. With a new and growing rise of digital media, how can fashion be understood as well as it was before?

Fashion Consumption in the Past

Fashion consumption has largely changed over time, with fashion today being heavily influenced by the digital era. One of the first fashion magazines ever made was published in November 1785, and was called the "Cabinet des Modes ou les Modes Nouvelles". The magazine was published in France, and regularly covered fashion news and looks. The magazine was made to empower women, and give them something for themselves to look at in such a rough time. The first magazine published in America was Harper's Bazaar, published in 1867. Just a few decades later, Vogue was published in 1892. Print magazines were the main forms of fashion consumption when fashion became popular, and were regularly bought by men and women around the world. Before print, in Ancient Rome and Egypt, clothes were seen as a way to indicate status, and many people would record and draw the many looks worn by royalty. Today, the digital era has taken over magazines. While many magazines still print their issues regularly, print magazines are now merely just seen as decoration, and aren't as useful and expansive as social media could be. The popularity of fast fashion, also brought by social media, is negatively impacting the design industry. The switch to digital could easily have impacted how fashion was viewed, as something much more casual now. Before technology, fashion was seen as expression, and was taken much more serious, as these looks would often go into the next issue of a magazine. With all of this being said, how bad would it be to go back to these times?



Looks featured in "Cabinet des Modes ou les Modes Nouvelles" 1786 issue.



Focus, Flow, and Deep Work

The following concepts are incredibly useful to regaining the attention of social media users to the world of fashion:

Focus refers to the ability to pay attention to the task at hand. This simple skill is becoming more and more difficult for humans, as various factors repeatedly interrupt our focus. Factors such as our phones, the environment around us, and even the food we eat all work against our mission to focus.

Flow refers to complete focus on a single task; the task is usually something enjoyable for the individual. Created by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow consists of a high level of concentration, a sense of control, and a decrease of negative thoughts or worries, with a clear goal in mind. Flow is most likely to occur when the task is not too easy, but not too difficult at the same time.

Deep Work refers to a prolonged distraction-free state that allows an individual to create their best work. Created by author and computer science professor Cal Newport, deep work involves the brain to work at its maximum potential when creating its best work.

All of these concepts may contribute to improving our shortening attention spans as a society.



THE PROBLEM

Productivity Issues

Social media addiction has shortened our attention spans for as long as it has existed. We are beginning to focus on single things for shorter amounts of time, and topics and trends are arriving and leaving faster and faster. Today, designers often turn to social media to show their work, just for users to view their video for three seconds and scroll to the next one. At this rate, how can we help the fashion industry stay alive for future generations?

The rise of social media has had detrimental effects on the individuals obsessed with it the most: young adults. According to Dr. Larry Rosen, a professor of psychology at California State University, the average teen and young adult genuinely believe they can follow six or seven forms of media at once. While this is so very far from the truth, all of these medias are still being consumed at one time. To give perspective on social media addiction, according to a study by Rubini T.R. and Shilpa Siby, 4.9 billion people around the world are active social media users. Around 60% of the world uses social media in some way, with people of all ages. Of these individuals, the average person spends 145 minutes on their phone a day. With this much consumption of social media, who needs print anymore? There is a massive decrease in the need for print magazines, though they offer the same things as digital copies.

There has been a noticeable decline in reading around the world. According to Gallup, a renowned poll company, it has been found that 57 percent of Americans now do not read a single book in a typical year. In a survey conducted by American Time Use, they found that between 2004 and 2017, the number of men who read books for pleasure went down by 40 percent, and women went down by 29%.

This rapid decline in reading may largely be due to the rise of technology throughout the years, as tech companies continue to market new technology for the public every day. Also found by Gallup, by 2017, the average American spent 17 minutes reading a day reading a book and 5.4 hours on their phone. This trend of unproductivity has ultimately led to the decline of print magazine production, as many magazines are now switching to mainly digital.

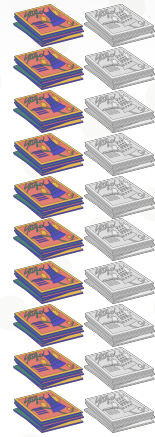
Impacts on Individuals/Organizations

This heavily impacts designers and their work not getting out there, and audiences not being able to properly understand the art in front of them. Ultimately, the design industry must learn to use newer technology in hopes of the right audience finding them.

Various magazines have even gone to the point of going fully digital. InStyle, an American monthly fashion magazine founded in 1994, moved to a "digital-only future" in 2022, after 27 years of print. This was due to their CEO Neil Vogel claiming that print is no longer serving their brand's purpose, as there has been a clear shift in readership and advertising when entering the digital era.

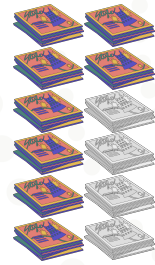
In a survey held by Vogue consisting of over 600 fashion professionals, it was found that trend cycles, commonly brought up and down through social media, are causing fashion professionals to burn out at an alarming rate. The amount of hard work and long hours put into making better trends and ideas for society cause these professionals to no longer enjoy their jobs, and leaves less job opportunities in the fashion industry. According to Johann Hari's *Stolen Focus*, as time passes, we are spending less and less time focusing on one topic, and for more than 130 years, trends have come and gone a lot faster. In an information-filled society, all our social media does is flood us with information, no matter how useless, and the amount of information being shown to us forces these topics to arrive and leave just as quick, if not faster.

VOGUE



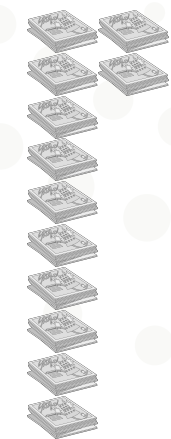
Vogue now prints 10 issues a year, but used to print 20 issues a year.

COSMOPOLITAN



Cosmopolitan now prints 8 issues a year, but used to print 12 issues a year.

InStyle



InStyle now prints 0 issues a year, but used to print 12 issues a year!

THE SOLUTION

To revive the fashion and magazine industry, we must understand how focus, flow, and deep work can contribute to improving our shortening attention spans.

As a reminder, focus is the ability to pay attention to a task at hand. This ability is getting much more difficult as time passes for many individuals. Improving our focus can easily help you further understand a designer's art. To improve focus, things like meditation or doing a digital detox is recommended. The rapid decline in reading today is also largely due to the decrease in focus for everyone. Various external factors regularly impact our brains and their ability to focus, so maintaining a healthy lifestyle is also recommended when trying to improve our attention and focus.

When analyzing fashion, flow states may be seen as motivation. Flow states are the complete focus on a single task that one may find enjoyable. Through fashion, flow states can usually be seen through a designer's hard work, and encourages them to keep designing. Audiences may see this hard work from their screens and try their best to interpret the designer's message through their work.

Deep work, the intense concentration on a task that can show your best work, is often seen in fashion today. Understanding or even creating a message through fashion requires deep work from a designer - what message can I relay or want to relay to the world? As an individual who enjoys fashion, designers often engage in deep work to show their pieces to the world, even if the world views their piece for three seconds.

Average Attention Span of Apps

 3-15 seconds

 9-15 seconds

 15 seconds

 6-15 seconds

 15 seconds

 15-30 seconds

*according to EMarketer.com



Effectiveness

Focus, flow states, and deep work have all been researched and proven to be much more beneficial for the mind and productivity.

Research by the National Library of Medicine says that a 10-year study made by Susie Cranston and Scott Keller showed that people who engaged in flow states over time were 500 percent more productive than before. Focusing on things you enjoy will ultimately get them done much faster, and leave you feeling better about yourself and your productivity.

Deep work is essential for those who want work done. Peak concentration without interruptions is crucial for those who want to express themselves through their art, as they can be truly focused on the message they want to relay, and how they will relay it. Deep work can ultimately lead to more enjoyable work, according to an article by WorkJoy. Also according to WorkJoy, less interruptions while working will ultimately end with less stress, less work errors, less exhaustion, and more work getting done. With the fashion industry containing almost endless hours of work from creating ideas to actually executing them, deep work should be seen often for designers, so the work they do can be enjoyable and comprehensible for everyone.

Examples

To maximize your creative potential, increased focus and flow states can help in a number of ways. Many companies have already implemented practices in helping their employees gaining productivity at work.

To give an example, Andrew Barnes, founder of Perpetual Guardian, found that giving his employees a four-day work week instead of five days actually increased their productivity as a whole. Through his experiment of testing out this four-day work week, employees have said that their minds were clearer and "fresher", and they had gotten just as much work done in four days as they had before in five. Their time spent on social media at work went down by 35 percent, and stress levels overall went down by 15 percent. Companies like Microsoft did something similar as well. In 2019, a Microsoft in Japan also moved to a four-day work week, and saw a 40 percent improvement in productivity in their employees. A Toyota in Gothenburg, Sweden cut two hours per day from their workweek, and their profits went up by 25 percent and mechanics produced 114 percent of their work before.

Implementing these practices can only benefit productivity, as they give everyone more time to rest well enough for the next work week. With such long hours and extensive amounts of work, the fashion industry could relate to these companies and use these examples to benefit the productivity in their employees.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Various strategies can be put in place to improve and maintain focus:

"Do Not Disturb" can be used to minimize cellular distractions when working. This strategy is encouraged to get more work done, and also tells others when your notifications are silenced.

A **digital detox** is highly encouraged when minimizing distractions. An example of a digital detox was done by author Johann Hari, when he abandoned all of his devices and went to a different town for three months. In the end, he gained new perspectives on the world around him, and enjoyed and recommended the same detox for others.

Smaller strategies can also be incorporated into your daily life, such as setting certain times for work to be done, which can give your mind a schedule to follow and help you get more work done. Another strategy is staying organized when working - keeping track of tabs, making to-do lists, etc.; research continuously shows how beneficial project management is to getting work done.

Achieving Flow States

Flow states can be pretty difficult to achieve at times, but are much easier to maintain when partaking in an activity you enjoy. To achieve flow states in the fashion industry, it is recommended to look into designers and artists' work or styles you enjoy the most. Everyone has their own "style" and interests, but not sticking to your current style can get to be pretty draining and overall not enjoyable.

Knowing what you enjoy in fashion can get the topic to be pretty enjoyable. Challenging yourself, however, is just as important. Branching out and learning about lesser known designers and artists can get pretty difficult due to social media mainly talking about known artists, but can be pretty fun when viewing art nobody really knows about.



Potential Challenges

Today, social media is one of print media's biggest competitors, and continues to negatively impact their numbers. Social media continues to pose as one of society's biggest distractions when working, besides stress. When viewing fashion on social media, all comments leave opinions and views on the looks and choices made. When viewing fashion, it is important to leave separate comments from the art, and create individual opinions of the work. Crafting one's own opinion is rare to see on social media, as a lot of content can mislead users or give them an opinion on a topic already.

Repetitiveness is also a major challenge in the fashion and design industries. Making something completely unique can be difficult today, as so much work has already been done. While repetitiveness is pretty common, it can also drive people away from creating things on their own. It is recommended not to let repetitiveness drive you away, but instead encourage you to learn more about professionals in the industry!



COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

By improving your understanding of fashion, this can ultimately improve your interpretation of many other creative works! Improving your deep work, flow, and focus to do this can also heavily benefit the work you create, and boost your productivity.

Alternative Productivity Approaches

Various other productivity approaches have been proven to benefit productivity, but not as much as others:

The **10-Minute Rule** consists of allowing yourself to work in 10 minute increments. Instead of being overwhelmed by one larger task, it is broken down into 10-minute segments to prevent procrastination and stress. While this approach may be beneficial for smaller works, partaking in deep work is much more beneficial when getting longer works done. Fully engaging with the task will help you show your best work, and also will help get the task done quicker.

Meditation is recommended to train your mind and redirect your thoughts, to overall give you a much more calm feeling. While meditation may be useful for some, it may lead to more stress and negative thoughts for others. According to an article by PsychologyToday, meditation may actually worsen symptoms for those dealing with anxiety, depression, or ADHD. Sitting in self-reflection may not benefit everyone, as it can sometimes lead to more stress or chaos in one's mind. If meditation isn't beneficial for you, it is recommended to participate in a hobby you enjoy, and possibly self-reflect about your world around you.

Implementing strategies to improve your attention is crucial, and it is also important to know which ones are right for you. Some strategies have shown to not work as well as others, as everyone works differently. Understanding focus, flow, and deep work, however, can ultimately help everyone get to these strategies. Actually implementing these when working can be beneficial, no matter what industry, as they aim to increase your attention and minimize the distractions around you.



CONCLUSION

Overall, the impact of focus, flow, and deep work have positive lasting impacts on productivity in the fashion industry. The rise of digital media has shown to negatively influence both the fashion and magazine industries, as numbers for both have gone down drastically compared to before. Social media addiction has altered many perceptions of fashion, and continues to drive others away from joining the industries.

Focus, the ability of paying attention to a task at hand, has been forever impacted by the rise of technology and the environment around us. It is recommended to minimize distractions around you, and live a healthy lifestyle to maintain your focus. Flow states are referred to as a mental state that involves complete focus on a single task, one that the individual mostly enjoys and isn't too easy or difficult. Enjoying your work is essential to getting it done, as it maintains your focus and gives you the motivation to finish it. Lastly, deep work, referring to a longer distraction-free state that allows one to create their best work, is crucial in designing and wanting to express a message that is possible for others to understand. Though digital media and the environment around you tend to work against the idea of maintaining focus today, it is crucial to minimize distractions to prolong our attention spans to longer than a TikTok video.

Call to Action

To be able to maintain focus today, it is important to implement these strategies professionally. It is important to prioritize the implementation of sustained focus, flow, and deep work - not only for understanding and creating fashion, but for personal productivity as well. Prioritizing focus and attention can support smaller artists and designers as well, and can only benefit their work. Encouraging the discontinuation of the overuse of social media is also important for helping others maintain their focus, and encouraging more creative environments around you can only benefit society's ways of thinking.

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