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Tradition preservation through fashion consumption: Contemporary clothes on Gaucho traditionalist culture in the South of Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Fashion inspired by local culture references is our starting point for understanding how fashion, as a contemporary and dynamic dimension, can preserve the capacity of representing and maintaining local traditions. Through an interpretive approach, we look at the relationship between traditional clothing preservation and the creation of a contemporary fashion associated with the gaucho traditionalist culture in southern Brazil. The study counts on 22 in-depth interviews with consumers and producers of the traditional and contemporary gaucho fashion movement, as well as document analysis and netnographic data exploration on gaucho traditions. Results indicate that even facing the resistance from conservative groups that aim to keep clothing stable over time, fashion producers and consumers associated the contemporary gaucho clothes as a modern mechanism for tradition preservation. It allows the adjustment of tradition representation in line with changes in social roles, especially gender patterns. Findings reveal that contemporary gaucho fashion challenges the rigid conception of tradition, once it represents a democratic instrument able to supply a sense of belonging adjusted to contemporary time. Finally, we theorize about the ability of symbolic representations of a particular culture to be transferred to emerging fashion elements over time, without losing the bond with the local tradition.

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KEYWORDS

Tradition consumption; local culture; Gaucho fashion; fashion transformation; culture preservation

关键词

传统消费; 地方文化; 加乌乔时尚; 时尚转型; 文化保存

通过时尚消费保护传统:巴西南部加乌乔传统文化的当代服饰

近期, 有关市场营销方面的研究主要关注地方传统被瞬时性, 全球性和市场调节这类价值观念取代后出现的一些转变和误导现象。却鲜有研究对加强地方传统和增强现代消费归属感这两种截然相反的行为进行分析。为补充并推进关于这一主题的研究, 我们对时尚领域进行了研究 (包括服装所需的衣服, 饰物和标志及其在社会群体内外所涵盖的意义), 借此分析商品能力, 即能够体现更为广泛的社会群体 (如拥有相同社会和文化特点的地区或民族) 的地方传

统和归属感。具体来说,本文首先选择了与高乔文化和认同该文化的社会群体相关的物质因素和象征因素进行分析。高乔文化处于巴西南部,利用了曾在该地区占主导地位的养牛牧场中的美学因素,这种因素甚至融入到城市居民之中。此外,这一地区的特殊性在于会有组织地努力维护和传播高乔传统,即高乔传统主义运动(Gaucha Traditionalist Movement,简称GTM)。面对现代时尚市场的动态,本文对高乔传统这一背景进行探究,研究问题是:时尚这一不断发生变化的现代维度如何保持对高乔本土文化和传统的体现和维护?

本文的理论构想是探究本土文化和传统在短暂的时尚潮流中产生的消费和转变。即使传统的意义在其产生的背景之外发生了变化,传统也是以合法化的过去为基础,在过去和现在之间建立联系。然而,现代市场对其他社会文化实例的估值导致传统的非市场调节观念和实践中公认的权威遭到否定。这直接影响到本土文化和传统的保存能力,而受全球性影响力调节的消费,在构建和维持全球性特征,损害地方性特征方面,却成为最强有力的机制之一。通常,只要构成互文性,时尚就会促进这种运动的发展,通过消费使文化因素与特征构建过程保持一致,调解个人欲望,文化约束和市场关系间的冲突。这种互文性特点会引发一种文化转变,将实践转变为普遍且短暂的价值观念,或者在多数限制型案例和少数研究型案例中,将文化意义引介到地方传统评估之中。通过实验,本文采用了一种解释性的方法来探讨时尚在提升高乔人归属感方面的应用。数据收集包括:(1)从二手资料(文献分析)中搜索与高乔传统相关的时尚信息;(2)对22位消费者和高乔时装制造商进行深入采访;(3)虚拟环境中的网络数据收集。

研究结果凸显出时尚消费主题以及该主题与保护本土文化实例间的关系(如传统和归属感)。本文发现,即便是在时尚需求日益增长的情况下,GTM的领导和成员也在努力维持传统的稳定性。GTM一直试图以发布传统服饰标准的方式来保持时尚潮流的平稳,进而促使制造商和消费者了解什么才是“传统服饰”。相比之下,另一组消费者和时装制造商则明白,他们无法控制传统发生变化,同时,关于创造和使用再现高乔象征却与GTM标准不符的服装,这种全新的时尚理念也是不可能实现的。这种高乔时尚风格与GTM渴望稳定产生冲突。对这一冲突的理解要围绕女性社会表现产生的变化,这种变化尤其会对女性的服饰产生影响,摆脱了最初以男性形象为中心的审美模式。此外,本文还观察到高乔时尚具有现代风格,但在象征意义方面仍然与高乔文化背景相关联。若要保持现代时尚潮流不断更新,可以把当前的时尚特征因素融入到过去的时尚表现之中,以保持传统服饰消费的核心目标(将过去与现在相联系),但是也要符合目前消费者的需求和期望。

本文的实验结果有助于从理论和实践层面探讨消费者和时装制造商如何利用时尚领域的市场营销来改变地方传统这一问题。首先,传统和归属感在描述消费者地方性特征方面均起到十分重要的作用,本文重点强调二者间的细微差别,同时还强调消费者是如何认识到传统会随着时间发生转变这一事实的。虽然地方传统与现代时尚融入高乔文化的表现形式有所不同,但地方传统仍然是高乔时装制造商和消费者寻找时尚目标的重要灵感来源。其次,本文强调了现代时尚的一个特殊特征,即现代时尚可以在当地文化背景下重新调整女性和传统的角色。事实证明,这种重新调整意义重大,有助于鼓励女性保持与地方传统间的关联,同时,女性的社会角色和展现欲望发生转变,而重新调整并不会与这种转变相冲突。最后,本文发现服装可以遵循一条独特的发展道路,将现代使用方法或美学模式与传统文化的象征性表现相结合。与稍纵即逝的时尚潮流不同,运用现代服装可以帮助文化表现长期延续下去。这是因为消费者的兴趣不是一成不变的传统本身,而是传统拥有文化归属感的能力。因此,这些工具不必是传统的,体现时间稳定性的历史服装,也可以是现代服装,让文化在现代消费者的日常生活中得以体现。

1. Introduction

The submission of the most diverse social instances to the economic logic has set the market as the main place where individuals seek elements to build their socio-cultural projects (Slater & Tonkiss, 2001). The consequence of this process – described as society commodification – is the transformation of goods, services, and ideas into tradeable commodities distributed in a global scale (McAlexander et al., 2014; Vikas et al., 2015). This phenomenon has been discussed in consumer culture literature – especially through concepts like liquid postmodernity (Bauman, 2001) and culture of the ephemeral (Lipovetsky, 2009).

Previous studies identified the effects of contemporary consumption in cultural commodification (McAlexander et al., 2014) and in transforming and misrepresenting local traditions (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012). In consequence, the reconfiguration of local traditions (Ko et al., 2011; Vikas et al., 2015) reshapes the sense of belonging to a social group that shares common cultural particularities (Ger, 2017; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). However, while the literature prominently describes how object transformations change local traditions along the time, cultural processes in which objects reinforce local tradition are misunderstood. In one of the few exceptions, Türe and Ger (2016) study how objects representing a family's identity and tradition preserve their essence for generations, recognizing that the market can help to authenticate traditional objects rather than destroy their authenticity.

Seeking to complement and advance the theme, we studied the fashion – clothes, objects, and symbols that make up the clothing and have meaning within or outside a social group (Svendsen, 2006) – as a way of analyzing goods' capacity of representing the local tradition. Specifically, we developed an exploratory cultural analysis in the context of gaucho traditions in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. This context is especially relevant to study local traditions preservation considering the particular mode that local residents cultivate the gaucho culture as the main identity source (Oliven, 2006) as well as making tradition preservation present in consumption habits (e.g. food, drinks, clothes – Dalmoro et al., 2016) and popular manifestations (e.g. dance and music – Oliven, 2006). Gaucho culture is understood as the cultural universe running around the gaucho mythical figure – people living in the geographic region known as pampa¹, involving southern Brazil, Uruguay, and northwest Argentina – its symbols, practices, and habits. This culture uses the material and aesthetic elements of the cattle production ranches predominant in the region in the past, elements that are even incorporated by urban region dwellers (Oliven, 2006). The main ones consist of food and beverages, like barbecue and *chimarrão*² (yerba-mate tea), horse and clothes recognized as typical of the gaucho, involving, for example, pants called *bombachas*³ (britches).

These particularities make the tradition alive in people daily even with urbanization and modernization following global expansion in Latin America. Nowadays, gaucho is the patronymic for local habitants, considering themselves gauchos before being Brazilian (Oliven, 2006). The active participation of locals in cultivating gaucho tradition pushed a popular movement named Gaucho Traditionalist Movement (GTM). Created in 1947 by high school students' residents in Porto Alegre [RioGrandedoSulcapitalcity], GTM aims to support locals to “live” the gaucho traditions. GTM members seek to

recover cultural elements with local countryside ancient and reproduce them on around 1.600 chapters, namely, Gaucho Tradition Centers (GTC) distributed along the Rio Grande do Sul state (GTM, 2020). Actually, GTM activities involve actively around 2 million people – 20% of the Rio Grande do Sul population – and claims to be the largest traditionalist movement in the world (Oliven, 2006). GTM actions also actively involve sponsoring companies, media, and partnerships with local government (GTM, 2020).

GTM efforts are specially relevant in the regulation of traditional gaucho clothing, providing to population the detailed description of what composes the costumes, its symbols and ways of use, according to the movement perspective (Oliven, 2006). This GTM orientation is taken as support by the local groups in identifying what is “traditional gaucho fashion” and, orient media and market producers to develop products that foster the local tradition and support cultural belongingness manifestations (Dalmoro et al., 2016).

However, GTM’s action is not free of criticism, especially due to its attempt to preserve gaucho fashion as a static element over time (Oliven, 2006). Faced with the impossibility of controlling fashion ephemerality (Lipovetsky, 2009), gaucho fashion’s commodification actions have been incorporating modern and distinct elements from those promulgated by GTM. While former studies on gaucho culture well document the cultural tradition and objects (Oliven, 2006) and GTM efforts to preserve the tradition as a stable identity source along the time (Dalmoro et al., 2016), we highlight the challenges of fashion marketing and fashion consumption in preserving or misrepresenting local culture and traditions in globalized and ephemeral reality. In particular, we follow the research question: how fashion, as a contemporary and changing dimension, can preserve the capacity of representing and maintaining local traditions on gaucho culture?

While fashion is described as a useful instrument in the gaucho’s historical construction (Oliven, 2006), it represents the ephemerality of modern societies and the consequent substitution of the collective by the individual (Lipovetsky, 2009), of the local bonding by the global fluidity (Bauman, 2001). We argue that, precisely in a scenario of accelerated commodification and loss of local bonds, in certain cultural contexts, tradition can be considered, even partially, as a way of regaining a local sense of belonging. We describe the sense of belonging as a positive feeling of integration in a local group – i.e. someone who feels integrated in a university, knowing and feeling good with the social rules, considering symbolic cultural elements from that university as yours, incorporating university culture in their identity construction and in quotidian practices.

In empirical terms, we adopted an interpretative approach to discuss the fashion use in rescuing the sense of belonging to the gaucho people. Our findings deal with how the symbolic reference of tradition is transferred to fashion consumption to sustain consumers’ feeling of belonging to local culture over time, incorporating symbolic representations of a culture into contemporary fashion elements. In particular, we detail the effects of this dichotomous relation, providing theoretical and empirical insights on global fashion marketing while revealing particular cultural nuances from a specific context. Next, we detail these theoretical and empirical reflections.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Consumption and the transformations of local cultures and traditions*

Tradition is a general process of transmission which, even though changing over time, provides an interpretation of a perpetuated past. Thus, tradition is based on a legitimating past to establish a link between past and present, even if its sense changes outside the context in which it was created. Despite tradition not being a guarantee for the perpetuation of a culture over time, it provides solutions believed to be fair, not due to what they represented in the past, but due to what they represent today (Hobsbawm, 1984). In this process, attempts of stabilization and cohesion of the elements recognized as traditional conflict with the destabilization practices present in contemporary market practices (Lee et al., 2017; Peshkova et al., 2016; Vikas et al., 2015). When building markets, social and cultural subsystems are incorporated by a deliberate policy of economic appreciation called commodification, which tends to subordinate cultural relations to market forces. McAlexander et al. (2014), analyzing traditions' transformation processes due to market forces, identified that the incorporation of different socio-cultural instances by the market would inhibit the tradition role in building consumers' identity.

Market valuation over other sociocultural instances results in detraditionalization process. This process is described by Boeve (2005) as the interruption of the recognition and use of tradition in people's daily social practices. As a consequence, traditional cultural elements are projected to global consumers as a consumable good (Ko et al., 2010; 2013). This directly impacts the capacity of preserving local cultures and traditions in places where the consumption is mediated by global forces (Hall, 2006). Global forces involve brands, products, and lifestyles globally distributed and represent one of the most powerful mechanisms in building and sustaining global identities (Ger, 2017). Associated with a commodification perspective of society, global forces foster an inevitable trend of weakening of local cultures and traditions (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006).

However, the loss of the local culture and tradition can make consumers feel lost, stimulating a desire to recover some connection with a specific and stable culture (Hall, 2006). Consumption is a powerful mechanism to obtain this reconnection with a specific culture, once the market ephemerality in the same way that distributes global offers, can formulate alternative offers to revive traditions and commodify experiences capable of preserving local cultures and traditions (Vikas et al., 2015). Local culture is understood as symbols, habits, practices, meanings, material representations, and other specific elements of a place (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). Local culture adds meaning to the lives of the people residing in this place through the construction of a feeling that they are part of that place (Varman & Belk, 2009). This people's feelings of local belongingness cannot be easily replaced. It constitutes a mechanism capable of reintegrating local culture into identification processes even in globalization times.

2.2. *The transformative power of fashion*

Fashion promotes the movement of meaning from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods. By its turn, consumption rituals assist in this movement from goods to the consumer. Thus, fashion and consumption rituals constitute a trajectory of cultural

meaning production in modern societies (McCracken, 1986). Departing from this seminal perspective, concrete questions about dressing and even choosing what to dress reveal both the pursuit of individuality and the desire for connection to a specific culture, gender position, among other social positions. Fashion is intertextual, consisting of a representation capable to mediate the tensions between personal identity and cultural norms.

An example of fashion's ability to mediate tensions is its capacity to reduce the stigmas of a cultural practice, as highlighted by Sandikci and Ger (2010). According to these authors, cultural transformations can inhibit consumers' agency in their consumption choices. Fashion can transform stigmatized traditional practices into a modern and socially accepted practice as it allows clothing to be turned into something attractive and elegant. In addition, consumer pressure in the fashion development process can assist in empowering consumers ignored by the market. As an example, the case of the Fatfashionist movement is cited, as described by Scaraboto and Fischer (2012), in which mobilizations in the virtual environment took fashion as a tool in an attempt to transform the cultural and aesthetic values of society.

While mutated by its ephemerality, fashion also stands out for its ability to produce objects and symbols that can characterize a culture. In other words, according to Lipovetsky (2009), even fashion being ephemeral, not everything in it changes. We can assume that the ability to transmit cultural meanings allows fashion to help compose this culture and ensure a feeling of belonging for its bearers (Lipovetsky, 2009). Thus, when the society commodification in a global scale seems to also homogenize the fashion consumed by the globe, fashion itself can serve as a resource for evoking cultural elements (Ko et al., 2011) and building distinct identities. This process is well identified in gaucho culture, where southern Brazilian inhabitants demonstrated a valuation of local traditions as a pillar in the identity construction (Oliven, 2006). This leads us to suppose that even in the face of change, fashion – as well as other cultural goods (Türe & Ger, 2016) – preserves its ability to transmit cultural meanings, helping the representation of belonging and local tradition. Next, we explore these theoretical reflections in empirical terms.

3. Research method

The empirical verification of the theoretical reflections presented above took place through an interpretative perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). We are interested in understanding the fashion dimension within the cultural universe running around the gaucho mythical figure, its symbols, practices, and habits (Oliven, 2006) namely here as gaucho culture. In defining the boundaries of the unit of analysis, we seek to go beyond the gaucho fashion perception promulgated by GTM, exploring especially the contours between the description presented by the movement and the constructions that operate outside this description. Using a qualitative approach, we pursued a multiplicity of social and material arrangements in order to identify a web of discourses and practices (re) produced by GTM members, gaucho clothe producers, and consumers.

For that, we employed a data collection triangulation to capture the multiple faces of this web of discourses and practices using three distinct steps: (1) document analysis, (2) interviews, and (3) netnography. The combination of distinct steps aims to explore discourses and

practices from micro-level perceptions provided by respondent interviews (e.g. the meanings of the actors attributed to the clothes, how they express their sense of belonging to the gaucho culture and GTM leaders view) in dialogue with a macro perspective of the gaucho culture registered on documents (e.g. how official GTM documents describe the tradition changes and the conflicts between tradition and modernity). According to Giesler and Thompson (2016), the combination of micro and macro perspectives through multiple data sources provides a rich and varied empirical basis for theorizing in marketing. Additionally, the ephemerality of fashion finds on Internet an appropriate space to transit. Thus, we added netnographic data collection as an important methodological step to identify contemporary and ephemeral features of gaucho fashion in contrast with the traditional representation of gaucho culture that shines strongly on previously described data sources. Next, we detail each data collection step.

3.1. Data collection

Document analysis. Firstly, document analysis took place mostly from July 2016 and June 2017 and involved a search in secondary sources (newspapers, GTM reports and guidelines, scientific articles and academic and non-academic books about the gaucho culture and GTM trajectory) about the fashion linked to gaucho traditions. This step provides an exploratory immersion in the gaucho cultural field with the objective to explore the phenomenon, helping the researcher to understand cultural symbols, terms, objects, key actors, among other elements. It also supports the construction of the interview guide on the second step. Document dataset analysis allows to observe an emergent fashion industry that explores gaucho symbols, reinforcing the relevance of our theoretical problematization. In this material it was also possible to observe two groups of important actors to understand this context: one composed by people linked to the traditionalist movement and therefore more conservative; the other, even having links with the gaucho culture, responsible for modernizing fashion.

Interviews. As a second step, to reach the two groups of actors identified in the first step, we conducted a set of in-depth interviews. We adopted the interview method aiming to get primary data about the cultural discourses and practices from the gaucho culture actors. Following Arsel (2017), interviews are the main data collection tool to understand cultural particularities in marketing studies. To assist the interviews, an interview protocol was designed with 15 questions organized around three central axis: (a) an overview of the interviewees; (b) informants' connection with gaucho culture; (c) informants' views about fashion. Each axis was organized in a matrix relating the research question, key theoretical constructs, and field observations obtained from document's analysis (first data collection step).

The selection of respondents started with a GTM representative. We then used the "snowball sample" technique in order to reach people with different profiles linked to the two groups previously highlighted: (1) consumers outside of the GTM, (2) consumers involved with the GTM, including GTM's representatives. Also, brand and store owners specialized in gaucho wearing were interviewed. Some of them are GTM members while others have no formal connection with the movement. The variety on informants' profile is useful to identify the web of discourses and practices that form the cultural context under consumer culture theorization (Giesler & Thompson, 2016). Combining the

objectivity of the snowball sample with the research subjectivity of judgment selection we attained a hard-to-reach cultural group without losing the diversity of perspectives in the informants' group.

Interviews were conducted in Portuguese (informants' and researchers' mother language) by the first and second authors in the second half of 2017. To reduce participant and researcher bias on responses we opted to conduct the interviews at informant houses. By 20 interviews, the researchers found evidence of data saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to confirm this and check for new temporal evidence, in the beginning of 2019, the last author conducted two additional interviews, totaling 22 individual interviews of about 50 minutes each. Table 1 describes the profile of each interviewee.

Netnographic data. Thirdly, we run a netnographic data collection (Kozinets, 2015) with the objective to follow the discussion flow in the virtual environment involving contemporary gaucho fashion and conflicts arising from it. This step gave us a deeper overview of the contemporary fashion objects, enabling to build a complete picture of fashion transformations within gaucho culture. In specific, data collection involves monitoring: (a) virtual spaces that address the subject, as blogs and vlogs about traditionalism and gaucho fashion; (b) discussions on social networks (Facebook, Instagram) of the GTM, brands associated with gaucho fashion and personalities involved with gaucho culture and fashion industry (e.g. Shana Muller, a gaucho singer who also signs a clothes brand inspired on gaucho culture references); (c) releases and news divulgated on GTM's website (www.mtg.org.br). The following keywords were used in this task: fashion, gaucho traditionalist movement, gaucho culture, women, *pilcha*, and female.

Netnographic data were collected from May to July 2019 by the last two authors, and the observations were recorded in diaries and shared and discussed between all authors. After a first selection of the materials, 36 documents were included in the dataset for analysis, in addition to the Guidelines for Gaucho *Pilcha* (clothing) published by GTM's

Table 1. Interviews profile.

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Role in the context of the study |
|-----------|--------------|--------|--|
| Aline | 34 years old | Female | Consumers involved with the GTM |
| Barbara | 24 years old | Female | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Breno | 25 years old | Male | Consumers involved with the GTM |
| Camila | 25 years old | Female | GTM representative |
| Cassia | 50 years old | Female | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Clarice | 21 years old | Female | GTM representative |
| Cristian | 29 years old | Male | Consumers involved with the GTM |
| Édson | 27 years old | Male | GTM representative |
| Emília | 27 years old | Female | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Geni | 60 years old | Female | Store owner specialized in gaucho wearing |
| Jamile | 25 years old | Female | Consumers involved with the GTM |
| João | 19 years old | Male | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Júlia | 37 years old | Female | GTM representative |
| Lídia | 38 years old | Female | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Lucimara | 38 years old | Female | Consumers involved with the GTM |
| Lúcio | 28 years old | Male | Fashion brand designer specialized in gaucho wearing |
| Maristela | 58 years old | Female | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Mirtes | 55 years old | Female | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Pedro | 33 years old | Male | Consumers outside of the GTM |
| Sheila | 37 years old | Female | Brand owner specialized in gaucho wearing |
| Tatiana | 26 years old | Female | Consumers involved with the GTM |
| Tim | 37 years old | Male | Consumers outside of the GTM |

website (GTM, 2014). These documents helped us to refine the analytic logic about the market configuration (Giesler & Thompson, 2016) involving a traditional wear style and an emergent contemporary style.

3.2. Data analysis

For data analysis, interviews' audios were transcribed, treated, and organized with the assistance of Nvivo software, as codes and categories, following Lofland and Lofland (1995) orientations. Our coding protocol was inspired in Saldaña (2015), involving the analysis of each interview or document as a portion of data. Firstly, we highlight "in-vivo codes", words, or expressions that express common discourses (e.g. fashion as a common sense, cannot adapt everything). Lately, we identified "process codes" to catch the action in the data, allowing some specific aspects in the actors' practices to show up (e.g. natural changes, incorporation of cultural elements). This process was predominantly inductive and involves all the authors in different roles. The first and second authors coded the first and second sources (documents and interviews) presenting the results in multiple rounds of discussion among the authors' team. In parallel, the last two authors analyzed the netnographic data set in the light of the same codes using Nvivo software. This approach allowed a triangulation of different sources of data and a distinct author's subjective interpretation.

After concluding the codification, all authors team reorganized the codes in four high order categories (following Lofland & Lofland, 1995). We then identified conflicting discourses and practices involving the desire to keep traditional clothes as a stable representation of gaucho culture (named as category 1) in opposition of the fluidity of gaucho fashion (named as category 2). The nuances about tradition and modernity as a conflictual situation were grouped in category 3. Finally, we identify in our data set that, despite the conflicting scenario, all the actors analyzed share a common sense of being part of the gaucho culture, forming the last category 4. After the data analysis, the quotes were translated into English to compose this publication. To ensure the quality of the translation, in addition to the authors' team – Portuguese and English speakers – an English expert participated in the translation process. These four categories, due to their procedural character, served as a support to create the Results chapter.

4. Results

4.1. The stable preservation effort of tradition in fashion

In the search for understanding fashion as a representative instrument of belonging and tradition, the first aspect highlighted in the field concerns GTM's action. GTM, as an entity that aims to preserve the gaucho tradition, also marks its actions around the (re)creation of what would be typical gaucho clothing, called *pilcha*, promulgating a document called Guidelines for *pilchas* (GTM, 2014). What draws attention in GTM's actions is the attempt to establish a stable pattern about what composes gaucho fashion. In turn, the movement participants understand that the guidelines for *pilcha* assist in guiding how to dress according to the gaucho tradition. Interviewee Camila is linked to GTM and comments that: "As a 'prenda'⁴ [gauchowoman], when I go to

official GTM events, I know what the rules are and what kind of clothing, outfit, utensils I can and should wear, according to what is being proposed. Because I always try to preserve what is right, wear the right *bombacha* [the interviewee referred to the female *bombacha* (britch)], wear the correct shirt” (Camila, GTM representative).

Interviewee Camila’s testimony also points to the notion that, in accordance with the *pilcha* guidelines, she would be dressed correctly. For her, what is not registered by GTM as traditional, such as new products designed by the fashion industry, should be avoided. However, even some consumers wish to maintain fashion as static, some adaptations have been made over time. Interviewee Aline, who is also linked to GTM, cited the release of *bombacha* use by women: “This was a necessary adaptation, because there was no outfit for the woman to accompany the man or for the woman to participate in countryside events. But I believe we need to take care of that a little, because we cannot adapt everything” (Aline, involved with the GTM).

GTM has sought to maintain the fashion static over time, through guidelines accepting only minor changes, in order to, in the view of movement members, preserve their ability to represent tradition. The search for preserving tradition can also be observed in men’s clothing. Recently, GTM manifested against the use of tighter *bombachas* by men at traditionalist events. According to a document published by the institution, new *bombacha* models would represent a total mischaracterization of this piece. GTM’s president also reinforced the GTM efforts to combat contemporary adaptation, arguing that “*bombacha* is a piece that does not evolve, it cannot undergo fad, it keeps a tradition of how this piece was in the past” (Sperb, 2018, p. 1).

Clothing preservation efforts are strongly driven by male references, while female clothing follows the wake of a male clothing conception. This perception presented by the interviewees can be evidenced in discussions about the recognition of female *bombacha* as a traditional dress. GTM’s Guidelines for Gaucho *Pilcha* is explicit that female *bombacha* is an alternative costume, which may be used only at “countryside events, sporting events, or as dance group uniforms in informal situations” (GTM, 2014, p. 11). According to the interviewed Barbara (not involved to GTM), these episodes explicit the GTM eminent desire to preserve what is meant as traditional clothing ignoring social changes that require clothing to be adapted to the time. These changes are related to the ephemerality of the environment where the fashion is inserted, and thus also allowing to reach several levels and points of society.

4.2. The creation of a contemporary gaucho fashion

In contrast to the official position of GTM and a group of consumers who seek to maintain their clothing stable over time, another group of interviewees believes it is impossible to control fashion, especially by the dynamism it represents. Gaucho music singer Julia says that “fashion is common sense of what is the trend at the moment. Fashion is what translates, therefore, the trend of the moment, of people’s behavior” (Júlia, GTM representative). In turn, the interviewee Geni (owner of a gaucho clothing’s store) states that over time gaucho fashion has been incorporating other elements of gaucho culture, resulting in a natural change of this clothing. The interviewee explains that today’s consumers are looking for products that are more adapted to everyday reality, while clothing presented by GTM does not always make this possible.

This need to look for clothing more adapted to daily life without losing the reference to traditions led Sheila to undertake a new brand of clothes, not recognized by GTM, but quite successfully outside the audience participating in the movement: “We will always find this mode of dress related to time, related to the availability of fabrics, the type of work that people performed, the place where they lived” (Sheila, brand owner specialized in gaucho wearing).

However, while Sheila, Geni, and other interviewees who work in the fashion industry and preserve some kind of bond with the gaucho culture have recognized in fashion their ephemeral character (Lipovetsky, 2009), they end up acting for an update of gaucho fashion. During fieldwork, both the incorporation of modern aesthetic elements into traditional clothing (such as a female pink *bombacha*), and the incorporation of representative elements of culture in modern clothes, such as t-shirts with gaucho expressions, were evidenced.

In line with the adjustments to the new social roles, the creation of a contemporary gaucho fashion mainly involves women producing clothes for women. The interviewees justify this change to the fact that they are mainly interested in recognizing the need and dressing as most practical, especially considering their daily routines. In line with Hobsbawm (1984) idea that traditions are written by today’s men to serve today’s men, the creation of contemporary fashion linked to gaucho culture proves to be a subtle way for nowadays women to seek cultural representations that serve them today.

The regional fashion industry and commerce have a supportive role in this process of reframing a woman’s role in gaucho culture. Barbara, a fashion graduate, expressed her opinion on the use of modern clothes with references to tradition: “[...] It is a way of demonstrating that a woman can also wear it, that she is part of society and culture, that she should not only wear a 18th century dress”. Thus, in the conception of consumers who adopt contemporary fashion, the use of redesigned clothing, but with references to the gaucho traditions, may improve the wearer’s comfort and thus also enable greater participation in events related to gaucho culture or even allow expressing your gaucho identity in everyday life.

4.3. Conflicts between tradition stability and fashion ephemerality

The conflict between the ephemerality that fashion assumes when walking along with social changes and the desire for stability that the attachment to traditions confers is perceived even by interviewees linked to GTM, as the interviewee Clarice points out: “There is always a lot of little fad, recently there was a controversy, a couple of years ago, about the clothes Sheila launched on her website. Which are really beautiful clothes, she wears in her public life, but sometimes it’s not in the regulation proclaimed by GTM as traditional” (Clarice, 21 GTM representative).

However, the interviewee herself acknowledges that, at the same time, there is a need to create new things and to adapt. Otherwise, in line with the findings of Türe and Ger (2016), objects will lose their meaning and fall out of use or become unworkable. An example Clarice provided is the need for constant updating of the fabrics used to make the clothes, once changes in the textile industry require new fabrics to be incorporated at the risk of no longer being available.

Thus, fashion producers see some adjustments over time as necessary. For them, contemporary fashion has the ability to preserve the link with local culture without distorting tradition. An example of this is the statement of the interviewed Julia: “I really believe how much these details that are used in everyday life, which are contemporary and are today’s, represent and refer to this universe of gaucho culture. And they also play the role of preserving some form of tradition”.

Interviewee Geni is more direct in her comment, criticizing the fact that GTM wants the gaucho fashion to be tough, inflexible. For her, this reduces people’s relationship with the gaucho culture, instead of bringing them closer. In this sense, when producers linked to gaucho fashion – like her and other interviewees who work with contemporary gaucho fashion design – develop new dress models, for example, they realize that the gaucho culture does not depend on trade, but trade depends on culture. Geni indicates that if gaucho culture disappears, the manufacture and trade of contemporary clothing, the most usual ones, will also have no sense. Therefore, she points out that, in her company, even producing a fashion not recognized as traditional by GTM, everyone knows about gaucho culture and seeks to spread it to consumers.

In turn, the interviewee Lidia (not related to GTM) emphasizes that care must be taken in creating a contemporary gaucho fashion so that the cultural bases don’t get lost in the way, but also don’t attach to stereotypes: “While you can’t have something 100% recognized as traditional, I also understand that it is demonstrating the feeling people have about their culture, mentioning some point, some object from gaucho culture, detaching a little from the stereotype of the gaucho countryman as the only way to demonstrate culture” (Lidia). The interviewee’s concern reflects the ephemeral character of fashion, capable of exposing the transformations of tradition. As highlighted by Türe and Ger (2016), even if objects change their shape, their reference and symbology remain the same, thus ensuring a balance between the ephemeral of fashion and the stability of tradition.

A central axis in the conflict between the search for preserving gaucho culture and contemporary fashion is linked to change in woman’s social representation, since the changes especially affect women’s clothing, moving away from the aesthetic pattern initially centered on the figure of a man. The interviewees use the practicality of contemporary fashion as justification for a more significant break than a mere aesthetic representation of fashion. For the interviewee Lidia, the submissive role of women has always been strong in gaucho culture, but, as in other societies, there are efforts to change this social configuration. She points out that “it is possible to indicate that women are increasingly present, for example, in traditional fostering events such as rodeos, where not so long ago it was a male-only environment”. According to Lidia, “more and more women are present in these environments, not only as spectators but as protagonists, increasingly seeking their space”. This process portrays the women’s search for reaching places and space in society where they were not previously accepted.

The interviewee Lidia also points out that the changes in the women’s position in gaucho culture are gradual and are in line with the change in fashion they wear. Thus, the attempt to preserve nineteenth-century dress rules based on the justification that tradition could be lost with these changes reveals more than a conflict between patterns of fashion consumption but also patterns in social behavior. Contemporary fashion is at the heart of this conflict, once while preserving an identity connection with gaucho culture, it breaks with some cultural representations, such as the women’s role.

4.4. The contemporary fashion capacity in the manifestation of the sense of belonging

For the interviewee Maristela (not related to GTM), fashion and culture are allies in the demonstration of belonging, since fashion can be used as a way of expressing people's interest in a particular culture. In this sense, the interviewees show a certain unanimity in highlighting the fashion's role in demonstrating belonging, because even contemporary clothes, such as printed t-shirts, can carry in their prints symbols and representations that locate their possessor. As said by the interviewee Lucio (fashion brand designer specialized in gaucho wearing), the gaucho has a touched upon sense of belonging, they like to express their bond with the gaucho culture through consumption and clothes. He also notes that the ease of including contemporary fashion in everyday life increases its consumption/use and, consequently, its ability to express meanings such as belonging to a particular local group or culture. This perception of the interviewees' dialogues with findings observed in the netnographic data. In a debate published in the fashion notebook of a newspaper circulating in southern Brazil, entitled "mullers e tradicionalismo [womenandtraditionalism]", different interviewees point out that the sense of belonging to gaucho culture is not in clothing, but in the idea. Clothing is the representation of such an idea.

In line with a commodification process (McAlexander et al., 2014) of gaucho fashion, contemporary fashion consumption represents the tradition tangibility in the form of a distinct material, but equally connected to the cultural context in which it was created. This analysis is evident mainly in the range of products offered in specialized stores, which increasingly incorporate elements linked to contemporary fashion in response to consumer demand. These stores are a catalyst (Martin & Schouten, 2013) for the consumption of gaucho culture, once they allow consumers to easily access different products, as *bombachas*, dresses, boots, scarves, espadrilles, knives, and numerous accessories that characterize the typical gaucho clothing or are designed to practice activities related to gaucho traditions, such as the rodeos.

The interviewees' verbalizations and the data obtained from the netnography indicate that the reinterpretations allowed by contemporary fashion are an important element to enable the connections and sense of belonging to the gaucho culture. As the interviewee Tim (not related to GTM) comments, the consumption of contemporary items related to gaucho fashion are a central element in constructing an identification with the local culture, but does not mean that he does not want to have his choices as a consumer: "I don't want to use a traditional beret, I want to use a reread beret". Updating contemporary fashion allows to incorporate current identity elements in that representation of the past, allowing to preserve a connection between past and present that are typical of traditional clothing, but equally in line with the needs and expectations of current consumers, constantly changing and supplied by the contemporary side of gaucho fashion.

5. Discussion

Our empirical results allow to advance both in theoretical and practical discussion about how fashion, as a contemporary and changing dimension, can preserve the capacity of

representing and maintaining local culture and traditions through gaucho culture. Firstly, we identify the tradition and the sense of belonging as essential elements in the consumer identity formation, as consumers see in clothes a mechanism to transmit the tradition along the time for their identity construction use. Even diverging in the way contemporary fashion should be incorporated into the expression of gaucho culture, consumers' sense of belonging emerged as an essential factor in the search for fashion objects, whether contemporary or not, that are capable of demonstrating this feeling. What's at stake is not only the gaucho tradition incorporation in consumer identity projects and their market practices (Oliven, 2006), but also a reflection on how this should occur: recognizing the ability of contemporary fashion to preserve the gaucho tradition while updating the women's role within this culture or seeing in this contemporary fashion a threat to the social structure of women's subservience, sustained by a notion of historical continuum.

From this reflection emerged a complex look that brings together two disparate elements: (1) fashion as ephemeral (in line with Lipovetsky, 2009) and (2) tradition as a rigid element. Our data analysis allows to observe these two elements operating concomitantly at the gaucho culture ontology, as observed in the categories 1 and 2. While GTM historically has been working under a rigid tradition perspective, contemporary fashion producers impose to the local culture a fluidity perspective. This dichotomic and conflictual relation is more strongly observed at the object level, once consumers, producers, and GTM members share a common attachment with gaucho culture. As observed in our category 3, despite all actors to be embedded by local traditions, GTM reproduces discourses and practices of stability while fashion producers' discourses and practices involve tradition adaption. This conflictual process gives form to the two main axes in the dynamic of contemporary fashion construction as a mechanism also able to preserve the local culture and traditions. As represented in Figure 1, the combination of these two axes has provoked distinct social actors' practices in the sense of reinforcing the stability – mainly GTM and its members position on gaucho case – or reframing the wearing patterns – mainly fashion producers position on gaucho case.

Despite the conflicting relation, our last category reveals that, in day-to-day consumption, people recognize in contemporary fashion clearly cultural references. In this sense, our data analysis supports an important contribution to the theoretical and practical comprehension of fashion impacts on local traditions. Contemporary fashion – even that assuming the form of a new object – can keep representing local traditions and culture in a symbolic way if the fashion producers are embedded by the local culture. Complementary, while changing the object, fashion designers and consumers can change undesirable features and social norms represented by the previous objects.

These findings contribute with global fashion marketing literature in three different ways. Firstly, we reveal that fashion can be a democratic instrument for traditional society transformation, counting with each consumer or producer, based on their personal premises of what is gaucho culture, and how it can be used to build their sense of belonging to a cultural conception. Fashion offers endless possibilities for consumers and producers to explore all aesthetic, material, and symbolic nuances of culture and tradition without being caught up in materials and disconnected forms over time. Thus, it is evident the construction of an understanding by local consumers that it is no longer necessary to be attached to clothing considered typical to demonstrate a sense of belonging in relation to a local or traditional culture.

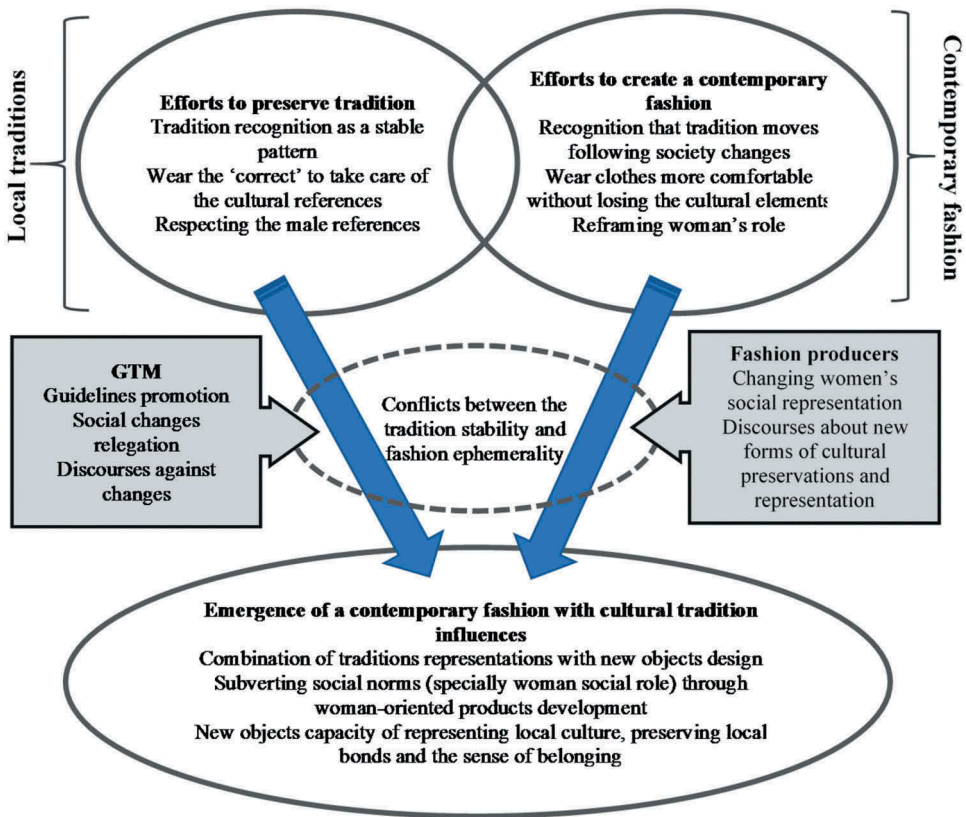


Figure 1. Dynamic of contemporary fashion in cultural tradition preservation.

Source: Created by the authors.

Second, unlike previous studies that recognize that contemporary consumption involves a detraditionalization process (McAlexander et al., 2014; Vikas et al., 2015), we identified that clothes can follow a distinct path combining contemporary usage or aesthetics patterns with a symbolic representation of a traditional culture. Thus, in line with Türe and Ger (2016) understanding, material transformations of gaucho fashion do not compromise its ability of representing the culture in consumer's identity formation. However, while Türe and Ger (2016) highlight the market's role in objects authentication, in the case of gaucho culture, GTM acts as a mark providing the cultural references. Objects created outside GTM guidelines gain more representativeness when they become assimilated by it, such as the case of female *bombacha*. Upon being recognized by the movement, it began to circulate even more strongly among participants and non-participants of the movement. Thus, it is important to recognize that, although GTM is resistant to the notion of contemporary gaucho fashion, it is still important to provide the guidelines that guide the symbolic elements embodied in this contemporary fashion.

Thirdly, in focusing on social actors' efforts of representing and maintaining local culture and tradition on consumption, we demonstrate the ability of symbolic representations of a particular culture to transfer to emerging fashion goods over time. Even in the face of fashion's ephemerality (Lipovetsky, 2009), representations that shape a culture

can be perpetuated over time. This implies breaking with the conception that tradition needs the preservation of stable material elements over time to exist. The explanation for this lies in the fact that consumers' interest is not in the tradition itself – as something unchangeable, but in its ability to secure a cultural sense of belonging. For that, the tools do not need to be that historical clothing proclaimed as traditional, representing time stability, but the contemporary one, which even different in its form, is loaded with representations of gaucho culture and proper to consumers' daily lives, especially the contemporary daily role of women.

In this sense, a complementary contribution for theory and practice on fashion marketing involves the recognition of the fashion effects on traditional social and gender role transformations. Fashion marketing's role through consumption is discussed not only as a tool for reproducing a global culture (Ger, 2017; Ko et al., 2011; Vikas et al., 2015), but also for adapting local cultures. It stands out particularly the consumption of contemporary fashion as a way of realigning the role of women and tradition within the local cultural context. This realignment has proved vital in encouraging women to maintain bonds with local tradition, given the transformations on social roles. This point can inspire both further theoretical analysis on the transformative capacity of fashion in conservative societies as well as inspire women to use fashion as an instrument to reconfigure their social role on a local culture, without overcoming the sense of belonging that the tradition can supply.

Additionally, in practical terms, the results indicate that fashion producers can support these consumers who are interested in contemporary fashion but are equally capable of securing cultural belonging. To do so, fashion producers can find inspiration on symbolic aspects of the tradition but adapting objects, fabrics, design to adjust the clothes to the contemporary necessity. Tradition is preserved by contemporary man and woman to serve them and fashion marketers have an important role in this process. Fashion does not need to be only a bridge between consumers and the global market, but also a bridge between consumers and local culture. In a world where people are looking for someplace to belong (Hall, 2006), fashion producers can provide multiple bridges in a single wearing object. Fashion producers help consumers preserve traditions while rejuvenating fashion to the interests and needs of contemporary society. The agents involved with fashion – consumers, producers, consultants – are not passive ones, constantly mediating their needs (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012) and cultural elements, including the construction of a contemporary identity, adapting culture also to the people's needs.

6. Final remarks

Considering the evidence from the results about the emerging role of fashion consumption in the realignment of gender roles, future studies could pay greater attention to this particularity in the consumer agency, which can use fashion as an instrument to change forms of oppression of social structure. Fashion can represent an empowerment instrument for consumers who, in line with fashion producers, enable adjustments in the social structure without necessarily having to leave the cultural context in which they are inserted. Finally, it is also suggested to follow the actual transformations of objects over time, reinforcing the understanding that local traditions and cultures can adapt to contemporary needs without losing the ability to provide a sense of continuous cultural

process. Fashion consumption proves to be a complex phenomenon, able to bring about changes not only in the market and in aesthetic representations, but also in helping to align cultural traditions with contemporary social needs.

In terms of management and its implications, companies can adopt fashion discourses that can respond to consumer desires, using fashion not as a destruction instrument of local traditions (McAlexander et al., 2014), but of a realignment of time-disconnected cultural constraints, such as the women's role and representation in a given culture. This realignment allows women to maintain the bond with tradition in a transformation environment of social settings and gender roles. This poses a challenge in rethinking fashion marketing not only as a tool for reproducing a global culture, but also as a voice for consumers' desire for local transformation.

Notes

1. Pampa is a natural, pastoral region with field-covered plains located in southern South America.
2. Chimarrão is a characteristic drink of the culture of southern South America bequeathed by the indigenous cultures. It consists of a gourd, a pump, milled yerba-mate, and water at approximately 70 degree Celsius.
3. Bombacha is a piece of clothing, typical buttoned ankle pants, worn by gauchos.
4. Prenda is the gaucho woman who is paired with the pawn. Her typical costume consists of a dress, with or without cardigan, whose skirt slit reaches the instep.

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