

THE EMERGENCE OF FASHION ELEMENTS IN PROTECTIVE FACEMASKS DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EVIDENCE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

PART II: INVESTIGATION OF FACEMASK TRENDS AMONG PINTEREST USERS

Elena Tomovska^{1*}

¹ Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius",

¹ Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia)

* e-mail: etomovska@tmf.ukim.edu.mk

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Abstract: *The global Covid 19 pandemic introduced a new item in everyday dress – the protective facemask. During 2020, fashion elements crept in the design of this primarily functional item. This research aims to analyse fashion trends in protective facemasks in the early stages of the Covid 19 pandemic. Photos with protective facemasks on social media were used, as traditional fashion photography underrepresents facemask wearing. The research showed that protective facemasks on Pinterest – a social medium used for taste discovery, showed cheerfulness, humour and individual creativity in facemask design. The uncertainty on how long non-pharmaceutical solutions in the fight against Covid 19 will be in place raises the question if fashion should be ignored. When persuading people to wear facemasks could fashion be the carrot to the stick of legislation?*

Keywords: Covid 19, facemasks, image sharing social media, fashion.

POJAVA MODNIH ELEMENATA KOD ZAŠTITNIH MASKI ZA LICE TOKOM RANIH FAZA PANDEMIJE COVID-19: PODACI SA DRUŠTVENIH MREŽA

II DEO: ISTRAŽIVANJE TRENDOVA MASKI KOD KORISNIKA PINTERESTA

Apstrakt: *Globalna pandemija Covid-19 uvela je novi predmet u svakodnevnoj odeći-zaštitnu masku za lice. Tokom 2020, modni elementi se pojavljuju u dizajnu ovog prvenstveno funkcionalnog predmeta. Ovo istraživanje ima za cilj analizu modnih trendova kod zaštitnih maski za lice u ranim fazama pandemije Covid-19. Korišćene su fotografije zaštitnih maski za lice na društvenim mrežama, jer na tradicionalnim modnim fotografijama ove maske se retko prikazuju. Istraživanje je pokazalo da su korisnici na Pinterestu, društvenoj mreži koja se koristi za otkrivanje ukusa, pokazali vedrinu, humor i individualnu kreativnost u dizajnu zaštitnih maski za lice. Neizvesnost koliko dugo će se nefarmaceutska rešenja maski koristiti u borbi protiv Covid-19 nameće pitanje da li se moda treba ignorisati. Prilikom ubeđivanja ljudi da nose maske može li moda biti šargarepa na štapu zakona?*

Ključne reči: Covid-19, maske za lice, imidž bazirane socijalne mreže, moda.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Fashion begins where the desire for novelty relegates functional considerations to a secondary level” [1]. From the beginning of 2020 protective facemasks have transformed from a primarily functional item to include a varying degree of decoration. The novelty aspect was best witnessed in the prolific designs of textile masks, homemade or ready-to-wear, even if in some cases (e.g. protective facemasks to match swimming suits) personal protection was doubtful. Moreover, the addition of aesthetic and decorative elements is opposed to the definition of functional design, as presented by the Textile Terms and Definitions published by The Textile Institute. Designing surgical masks and FFRs in new colour pallets be it plain black or pastel brings an element of fashion in the design. Fashion transcends aesthetic design by providing individuals with the opportunity to broadcast their views on society, its politics, its environmental concerns or its social issues through dress [2]. Baring seasonality, it can be argued that the protective facemask in the past year has acquired all additional fashion concepts.

The democratization of fashion through affordable clothing in the 20th century made the way we dress a reflection on our personalities [1]. Whereas examples of obligatory dress codes can be traced even today in some countries, the protective facemask was the first mandatory item of clothing imposed in western cultures in centuries.

Wearing protective facemasks in public places is a prevalent practice in many East Asian countries, either as a common courtesy when an individual has a cold or as a prevention against air pollution [3]. In the west, prior to the Covid pandemic, it was rarely witnessed. Leone [4] has explored the meaning of a surgical mask to the western mind. He argues that these masks are not just associated with the idea of medical treatment, but rather with that of traumatic medicalization, a situation indicative of risk and danger for the wearer. Further psychological evidence presented by Howard [5] identified undesirable appearance as a key psychological impact of protective facemasks. These arguments can be seen as a contributing factor to the desire to personalize the protective facemask, even at the price of reducing its functionality. The aspect of individualism versus collectivism was considered as one of the key drivers for adherence to wearing protective facemasks [6]. While in collectivistic cultures people tend to conform to social norms, in individualistic cultures they are prone to reject rules and are less likely to adapt to behavior change.

Sustainability was a key issue in the fashion industry of 2019, as such reflected in the perceptions of protective facemasks. Research has been conducted on extending the lifetime of disposable masks by reuse [7] or diminishing their environmental impact by recycling [8]. Interesting examples of recycling textiles into FFRs can be seen in the works of Zhijun Wang, who since 2013 in cooperation with various brands, e.g. Nike, reconstructs footwear into FFRs for smog protection [9].

In 2020 protective facemasks globally have been used to express political opinions. For instance, they became a symbol of the political discourse between neo-liberals and national-populists as “pro- and anti-maskers” [10]. During the Hong-Kong protests, protesters used masks to express dissent with the Chinese government [3].

Origins of fashion elements in protective facemasks can be traced to homemade textile masks. Home sewing today has surpassed the boundaries of a survival skill and is considered to be a popular leisure activity since 2015 [11]. As a result, strong social interactions are developed in physical [12], as well as online sewing communities [11]. When shortages of medical masks occurred, the home-sewing community was one of the providers of textile masks for the general public. As defined by fashion diffusion theories [13], this places protective facemasks in the patterns of the trickle-up theory. Social media in the last decade has transformed the fashion industry [14]. Pinterest is unique among social networks to offer shared creativity, highlighting its use as a channel for do-it-yourself ideas for product customization [15]. As such, the platform is a valuable source for the trends of protective facemask customization during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Pinterest was one of the first image sharing social networks, with digital mood-boards on which various ideas, including fashion, could be “pined” [16]. Since its inception Pinterest has been fashion driven, with descriptors such as ‘style’, ‘outfits’, ‘fashions’, ‘clothing’, and ‘shop’ representing the essence of shared images [17]. Although both Instagram and Pinterest are based on the same premise of image sharing, differently minded individuals use the media. In contrast to Instagram users, Pinterest users show lower level of self-monitoring, resulting in differences in information processing [18]. Low self-monitoring levels indicate greater involvement with products, rather than concern with the products’ social appeal.

This research was undertaken to provide an analysis of fashion trends in protective facemasks in the ear-

ly stages of the Covid 19 pandemic. As traditional fashion photography underrepresents facemask-wearing consumer driven image shearing social media was used for documenting protective facemasks in 2020. The second part of the research investigates the representation of protective facemasks among Pinterest users as a representation of the street driven trends in facemasks.

2. EXPERIMENTAL

The research steps on analysing fashion trends were adopted from Kim, Fiore & Kim [19] and included awareness and observation, data searching and gathering, analysis, interpretation and synthesis. Rationale of the applied methodology is explained in detail in part 1 of this paper. Data from Pinterest post in the form of photographs as evidence of protective mask wearing was collected from 1.11.2020 to 22.11.2020.

Data from Pinterest was gathered using hashtags. The process began by using the terms "mask" and "facemasks". As the network generates automatically similar search terms, a snowballing approach in investigating the suggested search terms was adopted. In that way a total of 60 hashtags were investigated, namely:

Funny face mask ideas, Funny face mask pictures, Face mask quotes funny, Christmas face mask, Creative face mask ideas, Gothic mask, Goth face mask, Cool masks dark, Creepy mask aesthetic, Full face mask masquerade, Halloween face mask, Costume with face mask, Scary face mask, Skeleton face mask, Cricut face mask iron on, Face mask design ideas vinyl, Face mask iron on ideas, Mask saying ideas, Mask cricut ideas, Decorate face mask ideas, Face mask decorating ideas diy, Face mask design ideas paint, Funny face mask sayings, Face mask vinyl decal, Face mask, Black mask, Black face mask aesthetic, Cool masks mouth, Black mask masquerade, Face mask fashion, Face mask street style, Trendy face mask, Cute face mask design, Face mask design ideas cute, Face mask outfit women, Face mask fashion style, Fashion face mask 2020, Face mask fashion Korean, Mask style outfit, Bridal mask, Bridal mask indian, Bridesmaid face mask, Wedding mask ideas, Bride and groom face masks, Bridal mask ideas, Bridal party face masks, Face mask wedding favor, Bachelorette face masks, Mask making, Mask making tutorial, Costume mask, Holiday masks, Face mask gift ideas, Popular face masks, Fashionable face masks, Face mask to buy, Cute

face mask design, Photo face masks, Face mask photoshoot, Pattern sewing mask.

For each hashtag, about 600 photos and 10 new hashtags are suggested. When opening an image about 200 photos of visually similar images appear bellow the image. Both hashtags and photos are not unique for a single search, so it is difficult to estimate the exact number of photos examined, however its range can be estimated between 12000 (200x60) and 36000 (600x60). During the search, the content of the photographs was used to determine whether it depicted a protective facemask as defined in the research. The analysis was conducted until no new content could be seen in further searches. As the suggested search terms were automatically generated the research is limited to the suggestions profiled for the user by the Pinterest algorithm, however the large number of hashtags and photos helped to overcome this problem. Furthermore, trends cannot be dated to an exact month of occurrence.

Visual analysis of each photograph was conducted in order to see the fashion trends emerging in protective facemasks. Analysis of hashtags sometimes were helpful in determining the context, but generally, the visual cues were sufficient. The criteria of function and decoration were used to determine if the facemask was used as a personal protection equipment or a decorative accessory. Where decoration occurred the style, colour and materials were analysed. Distinct patterns of trends in fashion masks occurred.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In contrast to the representation of protective facemasks among the fashion conscious community of Instagram, presented in part I of this research, a simple observation on the quantity and quality of pictures assembled in the two investigated social networks confirms the grass root origin of fashion trends in protective facemasks. Jones [16] described the act of posting photographs on Pinterest as future-oriented yearning for improvement, a desire on how reality should be styled. The facemasks posted on this social media are playful, humorous, largely embellished, sometimes to the degree of completely dropping the personal protection function of the facemask. Examples of protective facemasks presented on the social media platform are given in figure 1, and the trends are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Although it is impossible to date the occurrence on trends on Pinterest, it is reasonable to assume that DIY protective textile facemasks were the first to appear. These are pictorial examples of a completed tex-



Figure 1: Examples of protective facemask trends presented on Pinterest

Slika 1: Primeri trendova zaštitnih maski na Pinterestu

tile mask with a pattern combined with instructions on how to make your own. Simple prints on tightly woven fabrics indicate the usage of available materials. The cut of these masks varies in order to improve the mask functionality. To increase the number of layers pleating similar to that in surgical masks is used. Another alternative are masks cut from two pieces with a beak-shaped covering for the nose, used to improve the fit. Improved fit can be seen in more complex pattern designs such as box-like masks cut from three pieces—a large nose/mouth covering and sides for covering the top of the nose and chin. A pocket for inserting a non-woven pad to improve functionality can be included inside the mask. Different ear fastening solutions included adjustable straps or ear fasteners included in the pattern cut. From here, creativity took off by addition of print or embellishments

on the basic structure or seeking for a minimalistic look. As all reviewed protective facemasks were made of textiles, and certification of textile masks in the examined period was not regulated, it can be said that they are of limited functionality and primarily created for their fashion impact.

Protective masks with a printed text/picture, generally humorous, were often seen. Given the psychological impact of medical facemask wearing described in literature [4] it is not surprising that humour was the chosen mechanism to combat fear. Text messages referred jokingly to the pandemic – “social distance expert”, “surviving 2020”, or sent encouragement to the community—“we are in this together”. Visual images were intended to replace the covered face parts for instance animal-face prints, smiles, lips. Seasonal prints to celebrate Halloween or Christmas were also

seen, particularly in masks for children. Individual creativity was expressed through hand-painted masks. Another trend is seen in masks with counterfeit logos of different high street brands (Nike) or luxury brands (Chanel, Dior, Prada, Gucci), as well as instructions on how to apply a transfer print. In some cases, the design sought to increase functionality. For example, as mask wearing affects individuals with hearing loss, plastic foils placed at the mouth improve the face visibility and can help with hearing problems.

Minimalism was seen in black protective facemask trends. However, some designs made up for the lack of colour by using materials such as satin, leather or lace, as well as architectural cuts to give interest to the mask. On the other side of the spectrum, trimmings were used to embellish the plain textile masks. In the simpler looks an oversized bow of satin, tulle, neckties etc. is either tied to the mask strings or used to fasten the mask to the ears. Designs that are more elaborate had various non-textile (beads of various size) or textile elements (nets, lace, muslin, embroidery, etc.) in different colours sewn onto a ground facemask. The applications were sculptural and often covered a surface outside the face (neck, hair). Masks with floral applications of either artificial or real flowers can be considered as a subgroup in this trend. The ground facemasks in this group is usually from white fabric or surgical mask.

Protective facemasks coordinated with the dress are a noticeable trend. The masks are either made of the same fabric as the dress, or with large prints, lace, ruffles, pleats, jewels and other ornaments. The context of the photographs suggests that such masks should be worn for special occasions. For instance, wedding masks either white to match a bridal dress or red to match a wedding sari, bridesmaid's masks or groom masks could be seen. Face coverings such as scarves coordinated with the wardrobe could also be seen. Facemasks coordinated with a hijab, in primary colours with loud prints, usually geometric could be seen in the black community.

Highly decorative facemasks incorporating jewellery in the form of metallic nets, chains, beads, jewels, feathers, rivets etc. are another popular trend. In some cases, a ground mask was completely omitted, creating a decorative metallic veil with no protection function at all.

Hand knitted or crochet masks of coarse yarn and porous structure can hardly be considered fit for the function of protection. The look is humorous, often three-dimensional. The popularity of representing the

mouth as a motif persists in this trend, for instance, a tongue encircling the face.

4. CONCLUSION

During 2020, fashion elements crept in the design of a primarily functional clothing item – the protective facemask. This paper sought to demonstrate how fashion trends in facemasks were carried into their photographic representation on Pinterest. Portrayals with protective facemasks were reluctantly presented by the fashion industry in this period, yet consumer driven fashions as seen on the social medium Pinterest show individual creativity and style in facemask design. It is a well-known marketing assumption that when a consumer need arises, the market will find a way to satisfy it. The cheerful and humour based inspiration of these facemasks points to the need to combat fear with everyday clothing items, as well as to assert one's individuality.

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