FEMININE ASPECTS OF BRANDING

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Abstract. *Womanhood and fashion have been perfectly combined for centuries. The same remark is suitable for mythology in which the notion female deities creating life by spinning is omnipresent. It may have begun from the association of childbirth with attendant women who were spinning while waiting to take charge and become midwives. But during the previous century women started to become interested and they boldly imposed new clothing-style. So, brands appeared gradually and one of the most famous is related to a special, intelligent and ambitious woman, Coco Chanel. Our contribution presents key-points in her evolution and imperishable success. We underline also a few aspects important for this brand and its logo marking out their friendly footing with feminine conception without neglecting the mythological and historical aspects. Coco Chanel has been one of the most significant fashion designers of all times and her name is a synonym for feminity.*

Keywords*: womanhood, brand, logo.*

The intention of this paper is to wave a brief history of a legend of fashion, Coco Chanel, who represents a loop in all trends. Clothmaking has been of great importance since mesolithic (middle stone age) as Barber points out in his outstanding book *Women's Work: The first 20,000 years* (Barber, 1994: 26). It is also important in women's lives and can be traced back in mithology – Philomela, for example, who was transformed into a swallow by Tereus; her story has been told over and over again by Ovid, Homer, Rudyard Kipling, etc. The notion itself of female deities creating a life by spinning a thread is particularly Greek and runs through mythological thinking at a very deep level. After all, the Romans eqauted the Greek Morai with Parcae and the north population believe strongly in Norns, of Wagnerian fame. But our paper highlights a modern deity, a fashion legend, Coco Chanel, who created a few outstanding icon-fashion and then flew away in her little black dress. She liberated women from stiff clothes imposing an iconic casual chic trend.

In 1910 Coco makes her debut as a fashion designer by selling hats and thus opening her first store, *Chanel Modes* in Paris, at no. 21, Rue Cambon. After two years the actress Gabrielle Dorziat makes her appearance wearing a Chanel hat. "A hat's role seems to be similar to that of a crown, a sign of power and sovereignty" (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 2009: 173). According to Jung, to change your hat means changing your ideas, have a different view of the world, which is what was about to happen to Coco's life. In 1913 the second Chanel store opens in the town of Deauville and with it the first clothing collection is launched having a sports theme. The same year knitted clothes are launched and register a big success amongst women due to the creator's touch which added a lot of character: "the ease with which she knew how to give a chic note to any knitted vegetal fibre – not only you would feel she had taste, but most of all a hereditary trait of creating something out of nothing" (*Ibidem:* 181).

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Coco had made an important step not only in the world of fashion but she also invested in the historical and practical culture of an old and female-specific occupation. For thousands of years, women have been winding, weaving and sewing. From the very beginning, these crafts represented women's occupation. Starting from the stone age, then bronze and iron, the craft of manufacturing clothes has developed and the woman's role changes as technology and social relationships evolve. “The Greeks have associated a God to spinning. A thorough analysis of Venus de Milo's muscularity reveals that she couldn't hold her robe even before losing her arms. Why? Both her arms were pointing to the exterior – the left one was held up and towards the back, counterbalancing the weight with the body's inclination. The left arm's muscularity also reveals that she is standing in a position that is typical of the Greek way of spinning. In Ancient Greece spinning was the symbol of a new way of life.” (Barber, *op. cit.*: 233). Soon these occupations became any woman's business card as it was offering them the possibility of doing other things besides cooking and raising children. Even though these activities have developed in an uneven way across the world, their spread was obvious. Comparing with other practices, Coco was the one who brought into the modern world the one that was most useful and also used: sewing. As we've mentioned above, sewing offered her a new life and, through what she has created, she, in turn, offered a new life to the clothing style.

The jersey, considered until then a simple mechanical knit, became a fashionable fabric in the Chanel store. This fact is justified by Coco's entrepreneurial spirit, often an element of surprise in the strategies she would initiate in order to achieve success. “Above all, Chanel has been characterized by realism and everything related to the Chanel style has this realist trait. Chanel was always aware of how much things cost. One of the reasons for starting to use the jersey was because it was cheap to obtain. In 1916 Chanel bought from the textile manufacturer Jean Rodier an entire stock of unsold jerseys which she then transformed into one of her tight dresses and made it become chic. Afterward, she asked a fortune for that dress” (Karbo, 2012: 20). Here we should mention the concept of innovation which the Chanel house has often used and which has, in turn, brought receptivity and consistent sales from the public.

In addition to a strong identity, authenticity, and uniqueness, a brand needs to be innovative in order to remain on the market and maintain the relationship with its customers. Innovation constitutes a point of interest because it stirs up curiosity and it is often something obvious that no one had thought about. Coco has had this rakish spirit that has enabled her to cross over powerful barriers and act according to her intuition and most times she had attractive ideas for the public. Innovation also implies being able to make something out of nothing through the power of creativity and courage, but most of all aiming towards originality. When innovation and originality are interwined they create a product that is absolutely necessary to branding. Last but not least, the innovative idea needs to be a real one, true, honest, tangible. Coco had these instruments at her disposal and they were of absolute necessity when the Chanel house first started. Because any creation from any of the two houses was highly appreciated, Coco opened in Biarritz in 1915 a true fashion house with a 6000 francs worth collection. She put together there something extremely sumptuous - instead of a store, there was a villa resembling a castle in which she had invested a lot. She knew she was at risk, but she needed to succeed. Due to the avant-garde style clothing items

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had and the newness they possessed, aided by the strategic location of the house in Biarritz, Coco started having orders not only from France and within the first months of the year 1916 she had 300 women as her employees. „In that year of 1916, Gabrielle Chanel was the one who imposed such drastic changes to fashion that it made it seem as if was from another century. Women's right to comfort, the ease of movement and the growing importance of style over that of ornament and, last but not least, an unexpected refining of modest fabrics....” (Karbo, *op. cit.*: 261).

The year 1918 was important for Chanel. She opens up a new fashion house right in the very heart of Paris, at no 31 Rue Cambon, where she would later have her personal apartment. Its location is still famous today. Twelve years after her debut as a designer, Coco was going to leave a memorable mark in the perfumes' world history: „in 1921 the Chanel no 5 perfume was born and around which, over the years, her prodigious fortune was built. Approximately fifteen million dollars, if the figures made public after her death are accurate” (*Ibidem*: 342).

Alongside the Russian perfumer Ernest Beaux they created the scent of happiness, of freedom, power, and courage with the aid of the near eighty ingredients used. This fragrance brought her world fame and made the Chanel brand a name which would never be forgotten. The simple name of the perfume has an equally simple story behind it. Since launching a perfume was a premiere for the Chanel brand, Coco decided to name it after the launch date: 5th of May. Her triumphant name had to be part of the fragrance's title, alongside its date of launch: Chanel No 5. Number five stood out as a talisman for Coco and she had also other lucky birthstones: the lion, the diamant, a special flower – camellia. The flower was associated with the courtesan, who would wear a camellia to advertise her availability. The camellia came to be identified with The House of Chanel; the designer first used it in 1933 as a decorative element on a white-trimmed black suit, an essential element in the fashion paradigm.

The founder's strengths, combined with a lot of work, helped her become the symbol for elegance and build an empire of style based on simplicity. Coco was also known for her inspired strategies that she applied for the promotion of products which would later establish her. Similar to PR or publicity, in branding, when the future planning, strategy, and tactics are carefully structured and created staying true to a lot of internal and external factors, then, in theory, the goals are reached. Thus Coco applied a sufficiently clever strategy for the well-established perfume Chanel No 5. Coco returned only with a few unlabelled bottles which she later offered to her best clients. Similar to her many ways, Chanel introduced the free sample technique long before other contenders. However, instead of offering lipsticks to the *sweethearts* (the author refers to her most spoilt Chanel customers as such), she gives them a sample of Chanel No 5, and so *the sweethearts* return to enquire from where they could buy that fabulous perfume, with a white-hot scent. Chanel then replied that she didn't manufacture perfumes and that that sample had been just a chic gift for her favorite clients, something she had just discovered in some narrow streets. *The sweethearts* said in turn: „You must start producing such a thing”, to which Coco replied: „Absolutely not, under any circumstances”, „But you must, this perfume is fantastic” (Karbo, *op. cit.*: 153). In this way Coco had only to gain from several aspects: by offering free samples she was innovative and she also obtained an objective opinion from her clients

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as if the perfume had been made by an anonymous name, confirming thus what she needed to know.

The perfume benefited from numerous publicity campaigns, having as image public figures and well known American stars. In 1937 Coco promoted her own fragrance for the first time. This commercial was present in the American magazine Harper's Bazaar. A few years after, the symbol-fragrance Chanel No 5 was inconceivable without the one who had become its only and integral image, Marilyn Monroe. She was so taken with the fragrance that she became its ambassador without signing any contract. The Chanel brand choose to build its perfume image with the help of powerful women who would later inspire potential clients, giving a decisive classic air to the woman's personality (Suzy Parker, Jean Shrimpton, Catherine Deneuve, Carole Bouquet, Nicole Kidman, Audrey Tautou, Gisele Bundchen and even Brad Pitt became over time the people who agreed to have their name associated with the symbol of fragrance of the XXIst century). Chanel invested a lot in the branding strategies. Besides having attracted highly known public figures and with a consistent degree of influence over the general public, she managed to create for many of her products 2-3 minute long films in which a story strand would send a particular message in order to persuade the public of acquiring that particular product. The films give life to characters who have the role of conveying *sensations* and feelings associated with the product.

Feminine beauty needs to be complete so in 1924 Coco launches the cosmetics line. The first ones were the powder and the lipsticks. In the same year, she founds the *Société des Parfums Chanel* dedicated to the creation of fragrances and cosmetic products. In 1926 she would revolutionize forever the symbolics of the feminine attire. In the wardrobe of any woman a new black, small element made its appearance: a dress.

The little black dress is one of the house's fashion concepts that are still present today, being an irreplaceable element to any woman from a colour but also style point of view. This is the simple dress' profile which somewhat became Chanel's image. "In 1926 the American edition of the Vogue magazine predicted that a certain dress of overwhelmingly simplicity would become a sort of uniform unanimously adopted […]Will women in large numbers will agree to wear the same type of dress? This prediction seemed amongst the most absurd. Consequently, in order for the readers to admit that because of its comfort and simplicity this dress would owe its success, Vogue compared it to a car. Would the population hesitate to buy a car under the pretext that it will not be any different from others? On the contrary. This similarity would guarantee its quality" (*Ibidem*: 427).

The people's desire to be part of a particular story comes to the surface, to be one of many other who are part of a trend. This is expressed by the desire to own something that everyone wants, then the sense of belonging becomes palpable. The image and feeling you get when owning a certain thing sometimes overcome the fear of being like the others around you, rather the likeness makes people feel like they belong in the same picture. One goal of a brand is to convince people that by owning a certain product they receive drops of essence from the world behind the brand because a brand is more than just a firm, a company or a corporation. A brand represents a feeling that has to remain part of a person's soul thus compelling them to return where they acquired the products. Foremost, a brand has to sell an emotion. "By developing Freud's thoughts on the consciousness, in the 60's

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and 70's, a new discipline of behavioral psychology inspired people in the field of marketing and advertising to add a new dimension to their brands. [...] they found that most purchase decisions are far from rational thus they began to overlap the functional benefits of their products and services with strong emotional and psychological messages" (Pringle, Field, 2011: 127). Women perceived this unanimously adopted uniform through femininity that should have known no boundaries, but also a freedom that without a doubt before the 90's seemed so far. The image of the dress was built on the principle of free elegance. Coco freed women from the corsage and skirt that reached the ground, unveiled their necks and through simplicity created a new style that made themselves free and true. The emotion they experienced and the feeling of the mystery they received were what determined them to come back. Chanel managed to unveil women's qualities and highlight their assets ranging from clothes to makeup, perfume, and jewelry. The customer's trust was based on the conviction that wearing the clothes Coco's created they felt without reservations.

In 1925 Coco herself is the one who creates the logo that establishes the brand. The most widespread hypothesis is tied to the Aubazine orphanage in which she spent half of her childhood and whose stained glass windows inspired her to create the logo but also taking into account her initials, which are two interlocked and opposing letters C. The Chanel logo connotes luxury, intrigue, determination, splendor, elitism and luster through simplicity. The Chanel logo is generally represented in black, appearing in other colours when used as an accessory or as a component of the fashion houses creations. In this sense, the colours of a logo can determine the public's attachment towards the brand that they represent.

Regarding colors'aspects Oscar Wilde said something interestin which can be paraphrased - pure colour, unaltered by meaning and unmodified by the defined form, can speak to the soul in thousands of ways. According to the psychology of colours, black represents power, authority, luxury and seduction which makes it most suited to the more expensive brands. "By way of individualization, Jung considers black as the grim part of personality, one of the first stages of the journey. White, on the other hand, would be the end of a development in the sense of perfection. In this sense, he approaches the concept of alchemists for whom darkness marks the starting point of the Great Opera" (Chevalier, Cherbraant, *op. cit.*: 519). It's a colour that gives the logo an extra dimension of simplicity but in a sophisticated nuance that will always be established. The true and classic black, for Coco, has always been synonymous with the rigor in the uniforms from the Aubazine orphanage, which later morphed into key words of the symbolic elements found throughout the history of her creations such as "the little black dress". "Gabrielle's memory will have value[...]to fight as a demanding colorist against that which for centuries has been the tenaces and inconceivable prejudice... to deny the use of black, the negation of colour" (*Ibidem*: 618).

Form is another important component of the logo. The two united semicircles convey a positive emotional message and curbs, in general, tend to be often viewed as having a feminine nature. At the same time, the two semi-annular parts that intersect in two points convey the idea of resistance, unity, stability, but also love and friendship. The shape of the logo succeeds in establishing a close connection with the person who is viewing it because it conveys a state of stability and durability. If we enter into the essence of these two words, we realize that there are two indispensable ingredients for a brand, whether we

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look at it from the outside, ie as a public or potential customer, or from the inside, as a person involved in the business. The consumer wants to feel *safe* when he /she associates with a brand by becoming its client, he /she wants to know that this brand will newver disappoint him /her and will always be able to count on it through the trust it offers. For internal audiences this is all the more valuable. Almost nothing can be more important to a bran than to know it has a stable and faithful audience, this being possible by fulfilling the promises made. Here forms a promise-trust relationship that is absolutely vital in branding. Once a brand has built a positive image of itself in the mind of consumers, it also has to maintain it, which is not easy at all. Companies that try to captivate in an unrelenting manner, that is, do not respect their promises to the public, will never win. The sincerity that has to start from within the organization and reach every client is indispensable. Poor communication with the public or lack of honesty in the communication process are the biggest barriers in PR and advertising, and branding is based on these two branches of communication. Stability and durability represent the Chanel brand, given that after more than a century of history it is just as current.

The Chanel logo inspires a lot of safety, viability, luxury and power through its shape and colour, but it is also an element associated with a highly cared woman, advocate of an impeccable classical style. It conveys the idea of materializing some desires or ascending to success, but also the feeling of pride. At the same time we are convinced that it is a clear evidence that simplicity always has the strongest word because we are looking at a logo which has caused a huge impact on the public but at the same time it is as simple as can be. Comparing with our present days, we live in a stressful society in which we need to quickly assimilate the new, we must learn the lesson quickly and move on. In this way, in order for us, the consumers, to feel good and psychologically to have the feeling of freedom, we need these things to be as simple, accessible and convenient as possible. At the same time, one of the goals of a brand is that the logo and its name be received and retained easily and more so not easily forgotten. The image of the logo should lead the consummer immediately to the brand it represents. In this sense the logo of the two C has reached its goal because it is simple but of impact.

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