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**Clothing as an Element to Enhance Visual Identity in Pop Culture: An  
Analysis from the “Art Pop” Album**

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**Abstract**

This paper analyses the identity construction process of the artist Lady Gaga from her stage clothing on the album “Art Pop”. From the technical point of view of the fashion/clothing area and linguistic analysis, it is interesting to understand how pop singers develop advertising strategies beyond just exploring songs and clips but bringing to their clothes identity elements that refer to their current work. These choices help generate a complete experience for fans based on the launch of various products, creating a consumption field beyond the music itself. Given the potential of these strategies for contemporary marketing, fashion, more specifically clothing, takes part as a possible enhancer of this experience. Clothing collaborates in maintaining the visual identity of the albums, which, consequently, will keep fans involved and generate more profits for the artists. Regarding methodology, this is hybrid research, using theoretical bases of fashion and applied linguistics, with exploratory objectives of a qualitative approach. We conduct a case study with a historical basis, analyzing Lady Gaga’s album “Art Pop”. Thus, we use the discourse analysis technique, focusing on understanding the role of clothing in constructing the visual identity of the singer’s albums. “Artpop” marks the beginning of a radical change in performance, visual and communication style between Gaga and her fans. The singer’s third work was released in 2013 regarding different musical styles and inspired by themes already addressed by the artist in other albums, such as love, sex, art,

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fame, etc. In this new era, Gaga tries to bring the image of “rebirth” already on the album’s cover, with an allusion to the painting “the birth of Venus” by Sandro Botticelli. Using new communication tools to promote the work, the singer launched an application for more significant interaction with her followers. By proposing this hybridization of references in her art, Lady Gaga and her label sought to associate her star image with another mixing process between cult and so in the products launched during the CD’s promotion, including the attempt to associate the singer’s image with the Renaissance period, materialized by the image of the goddess of love from Roman mythology, Venus. From the conclusion, we expected to discuss the importance of clothing in creating artistic experiences in the musical area.

**Keywords:** communication, costume, Lady Gaga, recording industry, clothing.

## **Introduction**

Pop culture refers to general and contemporary media products, such as series, movies, and songs, but mainly elements observed in the entertainment industry, massified among the large population, becoming mainstream pop culture, highly consumed (Soares, 2014; Soares, 2015). Although this general conception defines the core of what pop culture would be, not every cultural product that becomes massified is part of this type of paradigm. With this line of reasoning, pop culture products have common characteristics that point, in a central way, to pop-rock music, an artistic musical genre mainly consumed among young people, derived from the Rock of the fifties (Janotti Júnior, 2015).

In this scenario, the demand for building fan experiences makes it possible to generate a series of capitalizable products, such as dolls, plush toys, books and fashion items, returning in financial profit in licensing and cultural capital for all brands involved. , considering the value added to these marketable artifacts. Soares (2014) comments that:

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Textile and Fashion (ICESMATF 2023)  
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We are at a stage of capitalism where we cannot work on binary analyzes of the relations between capital and culture. Today, cultural products have the interference of a sense of wealth in their genesis, linked to marketing and the ways of positioning brands within a culture (Soares, 2014, p. 2).

Therefore, when studying these products, one considers the potential for added value and the symbolism that permeates them. In the modern pop phonography industry, singers and their marketing teams understand these needs because, when releasing music albums, they are concerned with developing tangible and virtual experiences that go beyond just listening to songs or buying albums (Fontana, 2018; Ferrari; Zamberlan, 2019; Zorzo, 2019). It is noticed that these producers seek to build a macroenvironment that connects fans to the semantic meanings that permeate the central product, enhancing the musical experience with the album and generating positive affective associations that will be marked in the individual and imagery particularities of these individuals.

By fans, these artistic experiences can be called “eras”, paralleling the historical period that begins with a remarkable and striking fact or originates a new order of things. Therefore, what is called in this work as “eras”, within the musical perspective, as well as among fans, refers to the period of launch of a music industry product, more specifically one or more albums by a particular pop singer that, together with this main element, a series of other products are developed that follow the aesthetic-symbolic dimension of the central artifact. In this way, each of these eras has specific aesthetic and stylistic particularities commonly related to the messages the songs on the album seek to communicate. The combination of these products enhances a deeper immersion of fans in the works and releases of an artist.

In this context, the clothing, more specifically the costumes, used by these singers, inside and outside the shows, can serve as a booster of the identity and intended visual experience, especially in the development of the character, as they also use the aesthetic elements -symbolic elements of the albums and manages to communicate its generating concept (Sales et al., 2019). Clothing as a social element serves as an artifact of a silent

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January, 26-27 Madrid, SPAIN**



communication of meanings, which designers can configure in such a way as to develop the maintenance of the consumption experience with fans (Miranda, 2008).

With that in mind, the importance of the singer Lady Gaga is highlighted, having started her career in 2008 and won several awards in the creative industry, both musical and cinematographic (Herbert, 2010). Thus, it is observed that the singer mentioned above's musical releases are permeated by visual constructs that generate a holistic experience for fans in the different spheres of marketing. These strategies communicate her character to the public, where she can effectively use clothing to create conceptual and semantic uniqueness with her artistic eras (Silva Júnior, 2011; Nascimento, 2018). This can be proven by the iconicity obtained by the singer with her costumes, becoming a reference when talking about conceptual fashion and striking costumes.

With the exponential increase in multimedia platforms, the entertainment industry has been showing significant growth, standing out from the planning of innovative marketing strategies, and overlapping cultural barriers. In the context of the music industry, this need is no different. Bearing in mind that we live in a time when the experience of users/consumers takes center stage in purchasing decisions, focusing on ensuring a positive response in this relationship is configured as a means of standing out from other artists, obtaining more profit and cultural capital for the brand itself and its sponsors. With this, clothing, from a costume perspective, plays an important role.

In the development of musical shows, artists, especially in the pop music genre, tend to have a clothing creation team. These select costumes have a semantic relationship with the album and tour that is being presented. Therefore, the relevance of this research lies in need to understand the strategies of musical artists regarding the use of clothing products as a means of symbolic innovation for the visual identity of album promotion, focusing on the marketing of the fans' experience.

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Therefore, this paper aims to discuss the role of clothing in constructing the identity of the album “Art Pop” by the singer Lady Gaga.

### **Methodology**

This paper is research of an introductory nature, as its purpose is to focus on the construction of analyzes and discussions to contribute to theoretical knowledge in creating costumes in Fashion (GIL, 2008). Regarding the objectives, it is understood as exploratory research, as it seeks greater familiarity with little-explored areas, such as the application of clothing in creating marketing experiences in the music sector (Gil, 2008). A qualitative approach will be applied to consider the data, as it deals with the analytical view of the researchers involved in the project towards the studied phenomenon (Gil, 2008).

Regarding the technical procedures, the project is analytical research based on history, as explained by Santos et al. (2018, p. 152), “The study of history in the scope of Design involves the interpretation of the process of transformation of cultures and modes of consumption and production over time, through the collection of information from individuals and documents or artifacts”. This way, it analyses the general visual identity of albums previously released by singers. The case study method will also be applied (Santos et al., 2018), considering that it is intended to focus on the phenomena and experiences specifically involved in the releases of the singer Lady Gaga.

The singer Lady Gaga has launched, until 2021, 7 different artistic eras, a concept defined in the introduction topic. Chronologically, these eras are called “The Fame”, “The Fame Monster”, “Born This Way”, “Cheek to Cheek”, “Artpop”, “Joanne”, and “Chromatica”, each with its own artistic identity. For this paper we examine the clothing of the “Artpop” era, comparing the strategies employed in each of these with the other compositional elements.

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For a pertinent analysis to be carried out, it is necessary to establish legitimacy criteria, as these are the ones that will guide researchers in the process of visual decoding of costumes from each era (Orlandi, 2005 [1999]). To establish these criteria, the concepts of discourse analysis by Eni Orlandi (2005 [1999], p. 67) will be considered, in which “we start by observing the way of construction, the structuring, the way of circulation and the different gestures of reading that constitute the meanings of the text submitted to analysis”. In the context of this research, the text to be submitted to the analysis process deals with the clothing of each album and its relationship with the general experience. To this end, an analysis sheet will be built considering the main points to be observed, guiding analysts through the process.

The performative nature and the extravagance brought about in the conception of her costumes since her first appearances in public made Lady Gaga a contemporary symbol of post-modernity by reaching the same level as artists who influenced her musically and culturally to build her image. To express the different messages in her songs, the artist used signs, symbols and icons that refer to pop icons such as Madonna, Elton John, David Bowie and Michael Jackson to reinforce this balance between music and aesthetics, thus constituting new narratives and discussions for the public. To understand the discourse contained in her compositions is to understand “how symbolic objects produce meanings, thus analyzing the very gestures and interpretation that she considers as acts in the symbolic domain, since they intervene in the realm of meaning (...) to know how an object symbolic (statement, text, painting, music, etc.) produces meanings” (Orlandi, 1999).

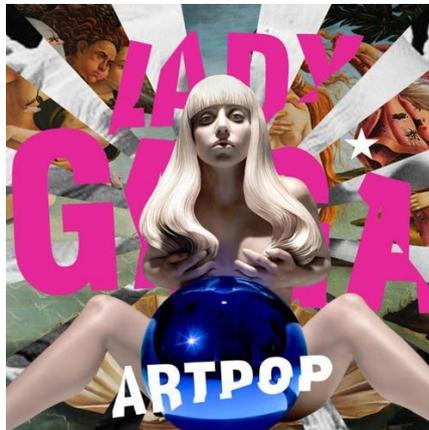
## **Results and Discussions**

“Artpop” marks the beginning of a radical change in performance, visual and communication style between Gaga and her fans. The singer’s third work was released in 2013, concerning different musical types and inspired by themes already addressed by the artist in other albums, such as love, sex, art, fame, etc. In this new era, Gaga tries to bring the image of “rebirth” already on the album cover (Figure 1), with an allusion to the painting “the birth of

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Textile and Fashion (ICESMATF 2023)  
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Venus” by Sandro Botticelli. Using new communication tools to promote the work, the singer launched an application for more significant interaction with her followers. Created by the American plastic artist Jeff Koons, the composition and conception of the album by the American singer Lady Gaga called “ARTPOP” brings together references from the Renaissance Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) to the modernist Pop of Andy Warhol (1928-1987).



**Figure 1 - “Artpop” (Lady Gaga) album cover**

In this work, it is possible to observe that the singer unites the classic and the contemporary. Even with some changes in the stereotype created in other musical eras, Gaga has not abandoned her performative and theatrical character, reaffirming her identity as part of this culture created by her. By proposing this hybridization of references in her art, Lady Gaga and her label sought to associate her star image with another mixing process between cult and so in the products launched during the CD’s promotion, including the attempt to associate the singer’s image with the Renaissance period, materialized by the idea of the goddess of love from Roman mythology, Venus. (Birth, 2018). A month after the release of ‘Artpop’, Forbes magazine published a review of the album on its portal. The text informs that after a quick survey of positive and negative criticisms of the album, a consensus on the material found indicates that the project does not present anything new to the public and is just a mix of different musical genres (Martins, 2014). During this period, a discussion begins about the trend of stagnation in Gaga’s musical style and more significant pressure from the media for

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reformulations in the artist's career. One of the successful singles from this work is "Applause", which follows the famous speech started in "Born This Way"; that is, it is a complete one from the previous album (Figure 2).



**Figure 2 - Lady Gaga costume in "The Tonight Show" presentation. Simple and white look that emphasizes the sensuality of the singer's body**

Presenting herself more maturely and sensually in some musical performances with this work, Gaga initiates a change in her "mother monster" costume by showing herself as a mighty woman already on the cover of the album, with artistic nudity amid references to artworks. The girl image gives way to a woman, mature, sensual, and able to say how to express her body and existence.

### **Final consideration**

Within artistic experiences, clothing is used as a form of communication. Therefore, clothes enhance symbolic meanings projected by the pop singers' styling and costume creation team in a way that makes sense with the era in question. Thus, we observe clothing as part of

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the construction of culture, which also involves constructing and exchanging meanings. The application of clothing in the context of performance in the eras of pop divas can be read through the paradigm of the stage, and theatrical costumes, in which these artifacts characterize characters and contribute to narrative cohesion, both for marketing and for the aesthetic-symbolic dimension of the artistic/musical work delivered by these singers. With that in mind, this essay aims to discuss the role of clothing in the narrative construction of Lady Gaga's "Artpop" album. Thus, we observe that clothing manages to play a significant role, serving as a means of conveying the music's messages.

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