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# Panorama of the use of Intangible Assets and Innovation in Brazilian Fashion Companies

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**Keywords**— Intellectual Property, Fashion, Innovation, Industrial Design, Systematic Review.

Abstract— This article analyzes the panorama of fashion design innovation in Brazil and how orthodox Intellectual Property institutes are used to protect these innovations. A systematic review of fashion law was also carried out to conclude whether existing protection is sufficient or specific regulation is needed. Examples of patent, utility models and industrial design were analyzed in a critical manner in order to conclude if the protection of fashion designs can be carried out through such institutes. Finally, a detailed analysis of the results of a national publicly held company in the field was carried out to assess the relevance of using intellectual property institutes to protect their own designs. It is concluded that patents, industrial designs and utility models are underused, leaving the possibility of protection solely through copyright.

### I. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the protection and use of Innovation in fashion designs in Brazil and how it can be strategically interesting for the fashion industry. The identification of two antagonistic currents in fashion: fast fashion, which brings news to the market aggressively, biweekly, with cheaper materials and in a way that is predatory to the environment (PETERS; LI; LENZEN, 2021), and slow fashion, more concerned with quality, sustainability and durability (YOON; LEE; CHOO, 2020), bring the need to qualitatively analyze the innovation of fashion designs as instruments of innovation that can be protected.

Defining innovation is not a trivial task, there are more than 60 definitions of the term (ALBU, 2017) considers Joseph Schumpeter, as the "prophet" of innovation and he conceptualizes it as "employing different resources in a different manner, in doing new things with them" (SCHUMPETER, 1997, p. 78). The concept has evolved since then, but it's clearly originated in the aforementioned Author's works. Today, in short, it can be said that innovation is (but isn't limited to) the practical implementation of an idea with effective use, in a manner which brings re-

sults to the improvement of a process, product, organization or marketing strategy.

Although it is a broad concept, innovation is considered an essential factor for market competitiveness, as well pointed out by Ionela-Andreea (2019) and Jin; Cedrola (2018).

Jin and Cedrola (2018) quote Schumpeter, objectively consolidating that, for the Author, there are five types of innovation: of a product, of a production process, the creation of a new market, acquiring a new source of supply or raw material, and restructuring of an organization. Such views on types of innovation are also adopted by the Oslo manual, which brings internationally standardized methodologies that allow measuring innovation (OECD/EUROSTAT, 2018).

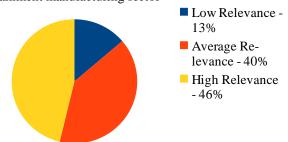
In Brazil, the Oslo manual is used to guide the data collection of PINTEC (IBGE, 2017), which is the National Innovation Survey, demonstrates that, in the Garment Manufacturing sector, from 2015 to 2017, there was a total of 14,365 companies in Brazil with more than 10 employees hired in this field, among which 4,969 implemented

some type of product and/or process innovation, meaning that 35.59% of companies in the sector sought to innovate in some way.

Also according to PINTEC (IBGE, 2017), of the companies in the Garnment manufacturing sector that invested in innovation, 2,297 of them reported that innovation was a highly important factor to stay in business, 1,988 of these companies considered innovation as something of average importance and 684 considered innovation as something irrelevant for their business. In the same period, R\$91,300,000.00 (ninety-one million, three hundred thousand reals) were invested in research and development in the area, which demonstrates that it is a sector of considerable economic relevance and that has reasonable levels of innovation.

The following graphic consolidates the data presented above:

Importance of innovation to secure market share in the garnment manufacturing sector



As innovation is largely subject to protection through intellectual property institutes, an analysis of the possibility of Design protection through existing intellectual property legal institutes is convenient.

It's not intended to use an Intellectual Property as an instrument for the fulfillment of Innovation. Excellent study by Sweet and Eterovic Maggio (2015), reveals that only countries with Economic Complexity Indices (ECI) and above-average *per capita* income have a positive relationship with robust Intellectual Property Regulation.

Although Brazil is in the 49th position in the ECI ranking, according to the atlas of economic complexity that ranks countries and product complexity (HARVARD COLLEGE, 2021), it is only in the 101st position of the per capita income ranking (THE WORLD BANK GROUP, 2020), so that legislation aimed at Intellectual property does not heavily influence the result of innovation or may even be counterproductive according to the aforementioned study.

There is no intention to criticize the conclusions of that study. In fact, it turns out that countries with low ECI rates and *per capita* income do not benefit from Intellectual Property Regulations as much as earlier countries on these scales, but what would be the alternative? Not regulating Intellectual Property? The question is rhetorical. Of course, it is convenient and appropriate for countries to provide robust protections for intangible assets, which even attract foreign investments, as well put by the Intellectual Property Index of the United States of America Chamber of Commerce (PUGATCH; TORSTENSSON; CHU, 2017).

Furthermore, developing countries aim to actually develop themselves, and it is necessary to prepare for a more mature market with extensive use and respect for Intellectual Property institutes.

Thus, industries that innovate may have an interest in protecting Intellectual Property arising from these innovations to curb the undue copying of assets that, if innovative, are often expensive to implement, as demonstrated by PINTEC's data exposed above.

This analysis has also exemplified existing and used protection modalities, such as trademark registrations, industrial designs, patents and what the litigation involving the fashion industry is about, the meaning of the scope of Innovation in Fashion Designs in Brazil.

Observing the fashion industry through conventional methods of industrial property protection such as patents can be considered "myopic and does not help to advance the global fashion industry to the next level" (JIN and CEDROLA, 2018, p 25), but, although the functionality of the garments is not so accentuated, the design and symbology of what they wear are important factors (idem).

Thus, given that there are protections beyond the functionality of fashion designs, a preliminary legal analysis will be necessary before entering the analysis of the protection of innovation in this field, considering that the current structure of the current legal regime is, even if partly, suitable for protection of fashion products and can be measured through it.

### II. METHODOLOGY

We stem from the theoretical framework brought by Schumpeter to analyze the reports and data found on innovation. The research consisted of exploratory research (SILVA; MENEZES, 2001) with bibliographic analysis, and a systematic review of the literature on the legal land-scape. A considerable theoretical basis for analyzing the issue was found and qualitative documentary analysis (IDEM) of patent filings that aim to protect designs with functionalities, as well as Industrial Designs at INPI, were also carried out.

A qualitative documentary analysis of the results of publicly traded companies listed on Bovespa in the fashion

industry was also be carried out to conclude whether the panorama of use and protection of innovation in fashion designs in Brazil, given that these companies are required by law to make their balance sheets available to the public and such information proved invaluable for this study.

These qualitative analyzes will be subjective and open to discussion about their interpretation. Our main goal is to provide insight into the point of view for the matter, so that the interpretations set out below will not translate into a final point of view in the matter, much less the only possible interpretation.

Benjumea (2015, p. 887) adequately considers that "qualitative research is interested in the subjectivity of an experience" (free translation), which is a view that we share and cherish.

## III. SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND LEGAL PANORAMA DISCUSSION

A comprehensive research was carried out, and although many articles about Intellectual Property protection of fashion designs were found (QUINELATO, 2019, PITA; LEAL, 2018 and FAKHOURI; MOREIRA, 2018) many of them approach the question through the eyes of the autonomy of fashion law as a new field of law, often advocating for new regulation (QUINELATO, 2019, OSMAN, 2017, ARROSI, 2021, and ZORATTO; EFING, 2021).

The conclusion drawn from the articles found on the subject is clearly that Brazilian protection for fashion is low, as it does not specifically protect fashion in its nuances and particularities. The literature indicates the existence of specific protection on the completeness of fashion design in different legal systems, such as the specific protection rules of the European Union, as well as national legislation in France and Italy. Outside the European Union, there are specific protections in the Kingdom United Kingdom and Japan (HEDRICK, 2008 and MARTIN, 2019).

On the other hand, it's possible to conclude that it is not necessary to introduce a new branch of law, complex regulations or specific legislation. As Martin (2019, p. 470) points out, the French and Italian protections on fashion are based only on "copyright" and that such protection is not only sufficient, as it is considered the strongest legislation in the world on the matter, indicating that the teleological interpretation of legislation would be sufficient to achieve such protection. There, fashion is not considered utilitarian, but "wearable art", which confers protection by copyright, which lasts one's entire life plus fifty years after

the person is deceased (in Brazil, the protection is extended to 70 years after the death of the author).

Martin (op. Cit.) does not distinguish between Copyright and *Droit d'auteur*. An interesting monograph deals in depth with this theme, which is beyond the scope of this work (ALGARVE, 2010), but this reference is deserved.

In Brazil, the Intellectual Property Law Doctrine understands that there is resistance to the use of clothing protection through Copyright because of the way article 8, VII, of the LDA (Copyright Law) was written, which provides for "the industrial or commercial use of the ideas contained in the works" impervious to protection by copyright.

It can be seen from the literature about this subject, that, in principle, fashion designs themselves, could not be protected through patents, as the shape itself cannot be protected though this industrial property institute, considering that the patent does not lend itself to this purpose. Though plastic form and merely aesthetic characteristics ordinarily cannot be protected through patenting, patents can effectively be used to protect specific elements of certain garnments.

It is also possible to conclude that, despite the Industrial Design being able to protect prints and some aspects of clothing, there would not be the possibility of protection by the necessary form of preexisting garments.

Such conclusions seem to be appropriate with the concept of Industrial Designs, including the distinctions masterfully highlighted by Denis Borges Barbosa (2020, p. 18), which consolidates all the distinctions between the institutes discussed so far:

Thus, if the creation is technical, it'll be the case of patenting an invention or an industrial model. If the creation is purely aesthetic, without application to an industrial product, it may be protected through Copyright; if it's a work of applied art, with the qualification of being able to serve as a type of industrial manufacture, we are in the domain of industrial design. (free translation)

The need for specific legislation to protect fashion is not an exclusive claim of Brazilian authors. Martin (2019, p. 470) informs that the lack of cohesive legislation on the subject has led to an increase in lawsuits involving Fashion Law in the United States, which could lead to a change in government policies focused on the subject.

The same Author mentions an article where she demonstrates that some universities, as early as 2013, already taught "Fashion Law" as a legal specialty, such as

the following institutions: Cardozo Law School, New York Law School, Loyola Law School, Brooklyn Law School and the Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY – State University of New York (PASOUARELLI, 2013).

After this systematic analysis, it is possible to say that, in fact, there is no specific protection for "fashion design" in a unitary, non-dissociated form in Brazil. This, however, does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Intellectual Property is absolutely incapable of protecting fashion designs through preexisting legal institutes when claimed within their specific fields.

However, we recognize that considerable effort and a sophisticated understanding of the law is needed to protect each feature within its particular sphere, which further highlights the importance of the proper use of existing institutes (patents, industrial designs, style records in the national library, trade dress, trademarks three-dimensional marks, among others) as instruments for protecting the designs.

The fact that, for example, the Industrial Design cannot protect plastic forms or prints considered to belong to the state of the art does not mean that the Industrial Design is inapplicable to clothing in general, and it is possible to find some designs of elements that make up the clothing properly registered as Industrial Designs within the database of INPI, although this number is not considerable.

Although it is not possible to protect industrially reproducible designs through Copyright, the protection of handmade products or products that have artistic characteristics (provided they are not purely artistic) is possible through this institute.

By the way, Kilmar (2014) considers the cumulative protection under different Intellectual Property institutes possible in Brazil. This hypothesis was rejected by Barbosa (BARBOSA, 2019) and the partial cumulative protection system is proposed by Souza; Peralta (2021), for whom protection through Industrial Design and Copyright can be combined, as long as the production isn't purely artistic, which, to our understanding, is the most adequate conclusion, respecting the solid contrary position of Barbosa (2019).

So far we demonstrated that some aspects can be protected through patents and, in fact, there are numerous patents on elements contained in clothes, deposits made precisely by companies that make shoes, pants, shirts, *et cetera*.

Therefore, the currently existing intellectual property is sufficient to protect a large part of the elements used in fashion designs, as long as there is an interest in the protection and safeguarding of rights by those who conceived the design, even if it is not properly aimed at protecting the overall fashion design in itself.

Both to illustrate the protection through existing intellectual property institutes and to quantify whether this protection is being used by designers, a documentary research will be carried out on fashion items that have been deposited with the INPI (the National Institute of Intellectual Property, which is the PTO).

Bear in mind that according to the concept of innovation brought by Schumpeter (1997), mere invention does not always bring effective innovation, as, while not implemented, "they are irrelevant from an economic point of view".

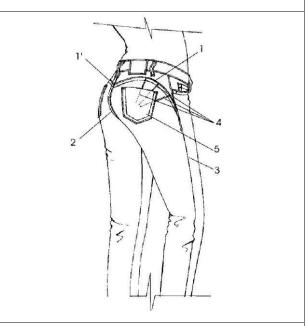
The difference between those who use intellectual property institutes and those who don't use them is simply the interest in holding exclusivity over the intangible assets resulted from the innovation. However, it is clear that more innovative companies tend to protect their creations through intellectual property.

For example, Nike has more than 830 Industrial Design processes in Brazil, according to a consultation carried out on the INPI website, many using the unionist priority criterion, with the filing being made primarily in the United States of America.

### IV. DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Documentary research on the subject reveals the existence of patents granted on clothing, as long as the clothing has a utilitarian characteristic for its design to be patentable, as is the case of the examples in Tables 01 and 02 below:

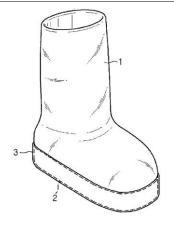
Table 01 –Example of protection of design elements through a Utility Model



"Improvement in Women's Gluteal Shaper Clothing" - Utility Model No. MU8802978-6U2.

Utility model patent 'IMPROVEMENT IN WOMEN'S CLOTHING BUTTON MODELING", consisting of a modeling system in clothing, which eliminates the uncomfortable system of straight seams, simplifying it to a system with arched seams, which provide greater comfort, better design and better practical result in use. (DERBAS, 2008)

Table 02 –Example of protection of design elements through a patent



"SHOES SIMILAR TO PADDED SHORT SHOES" Patent no. PI0618001-9A2

Footwear similar to padded short socks, where the present invention refers to functional footwear with a new concept, which adapt, by themselves, to the shape of a foot and promote a feeling of softness when walking with them; the footwear includes: an upper foot attachment section for covering and securing an upper portion of a foot, and a foot support section attaching to the upper foot attachment section for supporting a lower portion of the foot; the foot support section includes an elastic pad having a soft elastic body which can be deformed according to the shape of the foot; the shoes have a simple structure and can provide a feeling of walking barefoot on a spongy quilt, or on a thin fabric similar to a soft mat, to provide complete comfort to the wearer while walking. (MÜLLER; MÜLLER, 2006)

The example displayed in table 02 above is an invention patented through a Utility Model, as it is merely incremental on something that already exists (jeans), as it has practical utility, in the sense of providing more comfort and attributes its own aesthetic characteristic, as shown in the report descriptive of the invention.

The footwear shown in table 02, being innovative, in the sense of constituting something different that was never conceived before, it's a patent of an invention, denoting that despite containing a necessary shape to cover the feet, the invention was considered sufficiently new to be granted, precisely one of the requirements set out in art. 8 of the LPI – The Industrial Property Law (BRAZIL, 1996).

Its also possible to see industrial designs for protecting the visual elements of clothing, such as the configuration applied to a Nike shirt (Table 03):

Table 03 – Examples of protection of design elements through Industrial Design



Administrative Process No.: BR302014002714-0F (MURPHY, 2014)

From the above record, it is possible to infer that garments can be protected by Industrial Designs. It is note-

worthy, however, that the Registration of Industrial Designs in Brazil does not depend on the analysis of the merits of the application, only on the mere compliance with the formal requirements of the deposit, according to art. 111, sole paragraph of the LPI (BRAZIL, 9.279/96), according to which INPI will only issue an opinion on the merits if requested by the interested party.

From the presentation and "Release" of Results for the first quarter of 2021 of Hering S/A (CIA. HERING, 2021), it can be seen that there is reference to the use of open innovation, digital transformation, customer data and vision, omnichannel trading and innovation. In the "release" of quarterly results, the stimulation of the innovation environment through a "systems architecture" is expressly mentioned. These data are well described in the financial statements (CIA. HERING, 2021b, p. 53), where there is a description of what are considered "intangible assets":

The Company has trademarks and patents and software recognized as intangible assets. The value of trademarks and patents refers to the registration of the Company's trademarks with the competent national and international entities, which are amortized according to the validity period of the registrations. The software value refers to software acquired from third parties and generated internally, which is amortized over the lifespan defined in the appraisal report. All have defined useful lives and are measured at cost, less accumulated amortization and accumulated impairment losses

Notice that the terms "trademarks and patents" are treated without distinction, denoting a low concern for the meaning of these assets. It is also seen that in the description of intangible assets, industrial designs or copyrights are not even mentioned, revealing that data on these expenses are non-existent or strategic (and, therefore, deliberately not highlighted).

Throughout the demonstration, two partnerships with the artists "Verena Smit" and "Rita Wainer" are mentioned, in honor of the "Women's month". Although it is not possible to infer whether they were accounted for as intangible assets, according to the company itself, the collections and marketing strategies associated with these artists brought visibility to the brand and/or caused a social impact.

Royalties' revenues are not detailed, so it is impossible to define whether they result from the licensing of brands arising only from franchising instruments or whether other elements make up this revenue.

It is evident from reading the statement that Hering S/A invests in innovation through the designs of its collections, even pointing out that the "new basics" collection brought 17% of *new customers* and that the international women's day campaign brought 24% of new customers. However, it is very clear that there is no concern with the protection of these collections by the conventional methods provided for in legislation to protect Intellectual Property.

#### V. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to bring the panorama of innovation protection in fashion designs in Brazil and whether legislation and intellectual property institutes are sufficient for its protection. A literature review on the legal protection of fashion was carried out, as well as an exemplary qualitative documentary analysis in order to demonstrate whether the existing legal institutes are sufficient.

The consensus in the literature is that there is low protection due to the absence of specific legislation for the legal protection of these assets, given the lack of clarity and little use of the applicable legal institutes, respecting the conclusions that the protections provided by the orthodox intellectual property institutes do not are sufficient (ZORATTO; EFING, 2021 and GIACCHETA; SANTOS, 2018).

Despite such findings, it is concluded that there is some protection of fashion designs through preexisting intellectual property institutes, although their effective use depends on solid distinguishing ability over the applicable intellectual property institutes, since some types of protections by them sometimes overlap and sometimes exclude each other due to the way the legislation was conceived, especially with regard to Copyright and Industrial Design legislation, considering that in some cases the protections are cumulative, in others, mutually exclusive.

We've seen that countries such as France and Italy have orthodox protections, but their applications have a much greater scope due to the interpretation given by law enforcers, providing for a broader protection to fashion designs, which means that specific legislation only for fashion designs is probably unnecessary, being enough a clear distinction of the concept of what is considered to be protected by Industrial Design or by the Copyright Law or even if the juxtaposition of such rights is acceptable.

However, it appears that, even with this protective framework for intellectual property in the country, none of the biggest garment retailers use the existing institutes of industrial property, concluding that the current panorama

is insufficient or irrelevant for the industry, with the exception of those that invest heavily in innovation, like Nike.

We, therefore, conclude that the institutes are of negligible importance to the point of not even being highlighted in the income statements of these companies.

Analysing INPI's database and the balance sheets of some of the largest publicly traded companies in the fashion industry listed on BOVESPA (B3), such as Hering, C&A (C&A MODAS S.A, 2021) and Renner (LOJAS RENNER S.A., 2021), it's impossible to identify relevant data referring to Royalties paid or received in detriment of the use of Industrial Designs, specifically, although "copyright pieces" (contracted or in partnership with stylists, designers or artists) are considerably used.

The companies' innovation in their respective income statements was limited by the adoption of digital channels, use of technologies to reduce environmental impact, adoption of more environmentally responsible materials, improvement of sales channels and management of social networks, but no evidence was found about the development of Industrial Designs, patents or utility models for the protection of fashion designs for the three companies analyzed.

On the other hand, there was a perception of profit through the sale of products with added value because they were associated with artists or flashy visual elements, denoting that the use of copyright is the only legal resource possible to be used by industries to protect their own product innovations.

It is estimated that this result occurs because such companies use "fast fashion" collections and there is no interest in the long-term protection of assets that are so ephemeral, since the collections are changed very quickly and collections can be launched for each commemorative date, however, further deepening is needed to reach a conclusion about the reason behind such phenomenon.

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