

Selling Glamour Marketing Western Women's Fashion in Interwar Bucharest

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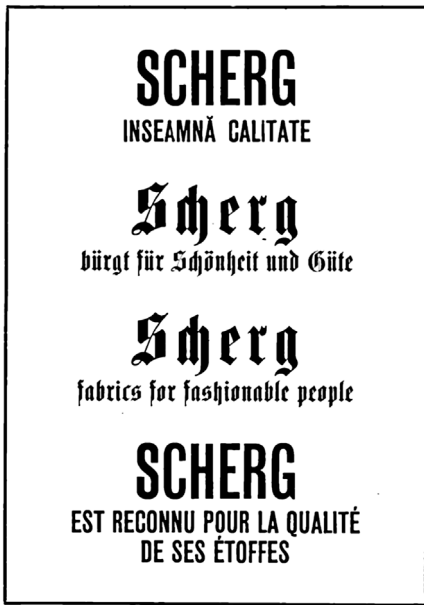


FIG. 1. Scherg ad in *The Bucharest Municipality and Its Surroundings*, 1939 map guide.

IN AN increasing climate of austerity and amid growing ideological and social unrest, the French-language Bucharest daily *Le Moment* (The moment) filled almost half of its page 3 with the simple picture of a perfume bottle labelled *Chanel No 5 Paris*.¹ The other ad on the page was for the Aragaz gas stove. Without all the markers of a traditional advertisement, the simple image of a bottle was nevertheless the perfect marketing strategy for an established house like Chanel to remind the public of its high status in the fashion and now the beauty world. This picture is even more striking considering the financial and political context of the late 1930s, visible even in the lower quality of the paper's formerly glossy, now yellowish paper. The implied outcome was that any Bu-

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charester perusing through *Le Moment* would stop for a moment and ponder about everything entailed by Chanel, from a particular manifestation of the Parisian spirit to simplicity and elegance. The interwar consumer would thus be conditioned to desire a direct connection with Paris, and if actual Chanel outfits were out of reach, at least a perfume bottle could add a *Parisienne* allure to the avid fashion-consuming Bucharester.

This paper is based on the understanding of fashion as a product of modernity intricately connected both to modernism and the material aspects of industrialization and capitalism. The rising popularity of cinema cultures throughout the world, in conjunction with the ongoing propensity for Art Deco designs, added a new chromatic dimension to fashion, visually and commercially.² Historically, frame modernity within the parameters set by Anthony Giddens, as a set of practices and innovations emanating primarily from Europe around the seventeenth century which subsequently spread worldwide by the twentieth century.³ This paper also acknowledges the insufficient material and temporal resources for consumers to keep abreast with all facets of innovation during modernity.⁴ This not only implies a need for support regarding the best purchasing choices, but it also opens the door for any entity or individual with enough means, skill and knowledge in social engineering. In terms of fashion marketing, this paper will follow the model set by Liz Barnes, differentiating the strategies regarding products, promotion, place and price.⁵ The historical literature on fashion has shown a propensity towards accepting it or some of its aspects when compatible with a certain agenda or ideology, or has downright rejected it as an elitist pursuit, suggesting a need for new systems fit for the growing bourgeois social and especially aesthetic structures.⁶ This paper will build on this ambivalence identified in the interwar discourse on fashion in terms of its artistic, industrial, economic or cultural impact. It will present the larger context of Greater Romania as reflected in advertisements and other promotional activities dedicated to interwar fashion-consuming women occupying the interwar Bucharest cityscape,⁷ understood as an amalgamation of the city (the physical locality) and the cityspace (the abstract city as a complex organism with a variety of local cultural enclaves⁸). Consequently, this paper acknowledges the poetic or archaic understanding of plural Bucharests, both as a marker of personal identity and of the multiplicities introduced by modernity.

Fashion, Marketing, Women

FASHIONABLE DRESS has been, as Djurdja Bartlett asserted, an established universal signal of “modernity—and thus capitalism itself” since the mid-1800s, whose progress, however, “took place within the geographically uneven processes of industrial modernization, colonial conquests, nation building, and media and market development.”⁹ Applying Matei Călinescu’s interpretation of modernity to fashion, Elizabeth Wilson explained that fashion goes beyond its common depiction as a “crucial medium for the construction of signs for changing desires and consumption patterns,” to an articulation of the “endlessly changing notions of beauty characteristic of culture in modernity.” As an illustration, interwar advertising introduced the idea of color as a sensory and emotional marker which enforced the importance of personal choice in women’s fashion.¹⁰ The consequence was an apparent democratization of fashion knowledge starting with modernity, encouraging the notion that everybody should have access to “chromatic expertise.”¹¹ Furthermore, as Wilson asserted, women’s fashion has a history of being the least likely to long for the pre-industrial long-gone past, instead enthusiastically embracing “the shock and the new.”¹² Similarly, Tiffany Webber emphasized that interwar fashion began a process of breaking past rules which would intensify after the Great Depression and World War II and into the mid-twentieth century to essentially interrupt “the supremacy of French couture, prompting British, American, and Italian designers to forge identities within international fashion.”¹³ The textile and fashion industries were among the first domains where women began to claim a professional status as designers.

The interwar era can be divided into two major intervals, separated by the Great Depression. The 1920s were the world of the bobbed, slender flapper or the *garçonne*, an era of post-war celebration, jazz and visible strides in women’s emancipation. With makeup use acceptable for respectable young women since the 1920s, Carol Dyhouse highlighted a visible stylistic gap between mothers and daughters.¹⁴ The 1930s were defined by the ongoing effects of the global financial crisis, coupled with the events and developments that would lead to World War II. According to Tiffany Webber, this was a decade marked by curtailed enthusiasm, ushering “the machine age, with its streamlined aesthetic epitomized by the skyscraper.”¹⁵ Industrialization was also a factor informing fashion geographically, later regulated through trade policies beginning with the twentieth century and particularly severe in the 1930s, starting in the US then spreading globally.¹⁶ At least in Europe, as David Gilbert contended, the so-called “geography of fashion” has a dual mechanism driven by what he termed as a “bourgeois ‘city’ system,” coupled by “a ‘courtly’ system of royal and aristocratic display” endemic to “national capitals.”¹⁷ This bourgeois-nobility dichoto-

my also suggests a possible approach for the modern interpretation of celebrity culture, particularly in the sense of revering fashion icons who belong to neither social category, at least on a formal level. Additionally, the words “fashion” and ‘glamour’ are not synonyms and do not always work well together either. As Dyhouse clarified, the twentieth-century interpretation of glamour suggested excess and luxury, with stereotypical items like furs, glitter or strong makeup.¹⁸

Christopher J. Berry outlined a triad of discourse on luxury stemming from shifting principles of “human desire,” namely “moralization,” “de-moralization” and “re-moralization.”¹⁹ The push towards consumerism during modernity has transformed the negative connotations of luxury as vice or sin, particularly juxtaposed with poverty, into a positive, desirable goal, which also garnered resistance on ethical or religious grounds.²⁰ In a similar manner as the world of art, luxury fashion engages in a process of “artification,” essentially assigning artistic qualities by adding material and symbolic value to a non-art object, thus increasing its social acceptance and desirability.²¹ Consequently, around the 1930s, exclusive fashion houses, especially from Paris, began to challenge pattern copying without paying royalties as piracy, yet the lack of necessary legal support hindered such efforts.²² The drive was not on grounds of artistic creativity concerns as much as an attempt to mitigate the great financial losses couture houses suffered on account of the unauthorized distribution of patterns. There were also concerns about clients themselves aiding the pirates, in an attempt to recover at least some of the money spent on haute couture.²³

The fashion industry’s mapping, however, remains fluid depending on the changing costs and risk in distribution.²⁴ Interwar advertising also introduced the idea of color as a sensory and emotional marker which enforced the importance of personal choice in women’s fashion.²⁵ One of the most successful examples of creative and technical skill translated perfectly into marketing was Coco Chanel, described by Christopher Breward as “designer, business-woman, hostess, leader of taste, and model all at once,” whose story and lore “epitomize the limits and potential of modern couture as monstrous publicity machine.”²⁶ Advertising in the early twentieth century was then not only an aspect of the new world engendered by modernity, but also a means of spreading the ‘modern girl’ and ‘new woman’ aesthetic globally²⁷ as a “multidirectional citation” of “mutual influences and nonlinear circuits of exchange.”²⁸ Applied locally, however, apart from enforcing Western models in non-Western spaces, the desired characteristics, particularly in cosmetic ads, belonged to “the production of national racial formation.”²⁹ On a related note, Giddens identified a “dialectical process” connecting international phenomena to local realities, usually resulting in “mutually opposed tendencies,”³⁰ which would make globalization more of a neural-like network than an exhaustive material and symbolic transmission.

The Romanian authorities became engaged in modernization industrialization efforts mainly directed to the textile industry.³¹ A related pursuit was to develop a professional tailoring education system in Romania, culminating with the official inauguration of the Romanian Tailoring Academy under the leadership of Păun Ballea in 1907, recognized officially as a “moral and legal person” by the Romanian Government in 1914.³² Because of all these, by the end of the interwar era, Bucharest already had an established class of modern skilled tailors and shoemakers.³³ While they were not on par with Parisian sartorial creativity, fashion stores and workshops did not spare any funds or modesty in their promotions.

As with any advertising pursuit, the desired outcome of fashion marketing is determining the target audiences to purchase the presented items and ideally more. Recent literature on shopping psychology has suggested a darker outcome beyond its understanding as an activity that cannot be avoided, an addiction when buying extends to unnecessary items. This phenomenon, as Marilyn Clark and Kirsten Salerno suggest, remains difficult to classify as an addiction because of how deeply ingrained consumerism is in the so-called ‘Western culture.’³⁴ While their definition of ‘compulsive shoppers’ gaining pleasure through superfluous purchases³⁵ could not be applied *ad litteram* to interwar Romania due to the financial and cultural constraints of the time, the advertising industry was already sowing the grains of consumerism as efficiently as in any Western or Westernized space.

The interwar Romanian understanding was more akin to Elizabeth Wilson’s depiction of fashionable dressing in modernity as a leisure activity, in the same category and inspired by other such activities of the so-called ‘machine age,’ each with its specific attires.³⁶ From the earliest days of modern marketing, advertisers recognized that the “promise of class mobility” was a strong driver of consumption,³⁷ also connecting to the idea of luxury as “the acme of material prosperity” selling an unfulfilled promise of happiness.³⁸ Aggressive promotional tactics also permeated into fashion from the world of fine art, exemplified by painter and Orphism co-founder Sonia Delaunay’s business pursuits into interior and fashion design, without forgetting the inclusion of visible product placements in modernist artistic performances that “urged women to consume and copy images of femininity offered by the Ballets Russes” as a precursor to later fashion-Hollywood tie-ins.³⁹ This also plays upon the heated interwar dispute, still very much applicable today, between the idea of protecting creations from mass reproduction and the claim that designs should be freely copied. Particularly in the case of Parisian fashion, the preferred route was protectionist actions and policies benefitting couture houses and their clientele desiring exclusivity and differentiation from the commonfolk. This choice was motivated by the fact that *couturiers* and *couturières* were the equivalents of artists under French law.⁴⁰

Even the choice of not following fashion is in itself a fashion choice and proves an inherent acknowledgement of an outfit's importance. As Anne Hollander suggested, the sartorial choices one makes are likely informed by their overall character, therefore one's fashion sense can be used in assessing their preferences, principles and aesthetic philosophy.⁴¹ In the late 1960s, Jean Baudrillard asserted that advertising is in itself a cultural product of our present civilization, which to a certain extent can be resisted "in the *imperative*," it can still assert itself at an 'indicative' level "to its actual *existence* as a product to be consumed at a secondary level, and as the *clear* expression of a culture." Under this interpretation, consumption occurs materially with the objects themselves and transcendently with the culture growing around the generated self-image of an "established agency."⁴² Its effects, ranging on a spectrum between satisfying necessities and addiction, would then be attributed to the "gratificatory infantilizing function of advertising," dictating a positive response as belief and "collusion with the social entity."⁴³

Baudrillard offered an interpretation of multiplication relating to models and series, characterized by Ulrich Lehmann as a "rather crude materialism" showing a "reductive understanding of stylistic or formal innovation, especially in the context of modern fashion production."⁴⁴ Furthermore, Baudrillard claimed that advertising was essentially a "discourse *about* objects" as an integral component of his semiotic depiction of the "system of objects," constituting "a useless and unnecessary universe" of "pure connotation."⁴⁵ There is also a subtle difference in replication between a fake product intended to seem real and the simulation which implies some manifestation of the original's deeper aspects.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, as Lehmann rationalized, "such (idealist) negations of production for inter-subjective relations in favor of representation and simulation" disallow the so-called "dialects of fashion" and any tangible insights beyond the "symbolic exchanges" proposed by Baudrillard.⁴⁷ This accentuates the idea already proposed by Michel Butor around the same time, of fashion as "fundamentally a diachronic phenomenon," considering how garments are presented in fashion magazines or spread by themselves, without citing their inspiration or material sources, which could also lead to errors in later research.⁴⁸

The *prêt-à-porter* industry was one of the most visible innovations as the fashion industry cemented itself in early twentieth-century modernity, attributed to improvements in mechanization bringing about a higher tendency for standardization. According to Webber, the chief requirement for the ready-to-wear market was to produce and widely distribute "simplified styles" for "decently constructed, inexpensive clothing."⁴⁹ Considering these outfits were no longer coded according to class or occupation and did not require physical space and time to decode, observers could now observe the wearer more directly, making

a classical disguise more difficult.⁵⁰ This also allowed for some advancement in women's status in the cityspace,⁵¹ understood as both the physical city and its cultural enclaves. While associated with another progeny of the modern age, the department store, the interpretation of fashion in interwar Bucharest advertisements seemed to insist on the model or item's point of origin, rather than on product quality or uniqueness. Romanian fashion sellers did not shy away from advertising ready-made items.

This mechanization can also be attributed to the emerging "visual technologies," particularly the moving pictures, which allowed the replication of the moving body as to seem serially produced. As everywhere in the modernizing world, advertising in Romanian thus became one of the chief means of action for both public and commercial entities. Several prewar advertising agencies, such as D. Adania, founded in 1878 or 1880,⁵² or Alexandru Bassa starting with 1913,⁵³ remained in business throughout the interwar era. The latter had an exclusive contract with the *Universul* almanac and the magazine *Automobila*, and vast railroad and civil navy connections.⁵⁴ Foreign agencies also flourished in interwar Romania. For instance, in 1925 Carol Schulder and S. Berger was already the exclusive ad provider for three important nationwide newspapers, *Dimineața* (The morning), *Adevărul* (The truth), and *Argus*, also with a presence in every National Romanian Rails train station and train car.⁵⁵ Also based in Germany, Rudolf Mosse provided any display option for all Romanian cities, with proper advertising networks, and described itself as the largest company in the field.⁵⁶ In 1937, their clients could opt for the usual ad spaces, but also for theater programs and curtains, or advertising through slideshows or films.⁵⁷ Yet modernity had not fully permeated Bucharest. While adjacent to Calea Victoriei (Victory Ave.), the main artery that led to Bucharest being called Little Paris and one of the main locations for displaying and acquiring the latest fashions, Lipscani Street still kept more archaic, pre-modern advertising promotional behaviors.⁵⁸ Despite the wide spectrum of applicability, all these practices dedicated to directing women's paths were heavily ingrained in fashion.

According to Caroline Evans, fashion finds its origin in "visual culture and ways of seeing," and as these become mechanized, people's perception of identity and movement also shift in the process.⁵⁹ Yet, if interpreted from Baudrillard's perspective, this serialization also liberates the user "from the function of the object only, not from the object itself," and in the process of multiplication its users are equally freed from its original meanings.⁶⁰ In this way, a woman wearing a fashionable mass-produced garment is disconnected from the design and production aspects of the fashion industry. This separation can be partially mitigated through labelling, particularly under a known name or source. But in

the case of haute couture houses, labelling *prêt-à-porter* items does not necessarily mean parity with the high-end models produced at much higher cost. Indeed, these early twentieth-century exclusive fashion businesses introduced the now-established differentiation between general and premium offer as described by Suraj Commuri,⁶¹ blending traditional design and distribution practices dedicated to the financial or social elite clientele with newer forms of industrial mass production aimed at the general population.

Since the interwar era, producing a ready-to-wear collection has been a lucrative means of assuring the survival of couture houses but not an objective in itself, involving mass-produced garments at lower prices but with name recognition. In effect, a famous brand name juxtaposed with a generalized acknowledgement of exclusivity also become a driving force for both label and individual item counterfeiting.⁶² This phenomenon defines, as Baudrillard articulated it, a world filled with “siphoned” objects “that refer formally and psychologically to models which only a small minority can enjoy,” thus forming a dual reality separated economically and socially.⁶³ Consequently, the idea of “latest Parisian models” can suggest a partial summary replication of otherwise inaccessible collections belonging to haute couture houses, likely without any input from and generating no reward to the original creators themselves.

Advertising Textiles

LA RULETA, owned by Brothers O. and L. Kühnberg, had been a staple in the Bucharest textile trade since the late 1880s, yet it still presented itself as “well supplied with the finest silks in the current of Parisian fashion”⁶⁴ in a 1930 advertisement published in the *Revista Generală Ilustrată* (The general illustrated magazine), a publication self-described as “political, literary, artistic, scientific, agricultural, commercial, industrial, financial, mundane, athletic.” While at a first glance randomly included in such a magazine, this ad connects the world of Parisian fashion with Romania’s domestic merchant network. Simply selling wholesale textiles indeed remained a lucrative pursuit. The Parisian connection was still present, considering the high quantities of fashionable fabrics legally and illegally distributed worldwide. This approach greatly reduced the costs and the time needed for production and distribution.⁶⁵ Yet, in Romania between 1913 and 1919, the cost of imported raw materials increased by over 1,600%, but this did not prevent a threefold increase in import volumes.⁶⁶ Traditionally, Romania had been importing colonial and oriental items from the Levant by sea, while most manufactured products originated from the so-called *Messe*, two

yearly fairs selling Leipzig products, on the days of St. George and St. Michael. Later Romania developed relations with Austria-Hungary, France, and Britain.⁶⁷ Textile raw materials and derivatives represented more than a third of imports by the 1930s, with vegetal fibers as the most popular. Raw textile imports saw a slight decrease until 1938, with wool in 1936, cotton in 1931, and jute, raffia, sisal and manila products in 1930.⁶⁸ Toward the latter part of the decade the situation changed significantly. For example, in 1937, textile factories amounted to 574 companies out of the total of 3,512 present throughout Romania. This meant 157 for weaving cotton, 99 for thread and wool, 95 for knitwear, 51 for silk products, 21 for curtains and veils and the same number for rope, while 17 factories produced hats, 10 ready-made clothes, and 73 various other items.⁶⁹

Building on the globalizing tendencies introduced by modernity,⁷⁰ fashion is by definition transnational. Its claim of authenticity is then artificial within cultures marked by hybridities generated by “migration, exchange and cross-fertilization, even before the advent of the colonial era.”⁷¹ This also connects to Wilson’s insight on the relationship between modernity and the ‘Other,’ understood as a “specter of the past,” which instead of eradicating the irrational, as professed by the age of reason, only gives other avenues of expression.⁷² Considering our limited understanding of the more distant past, the discontinuities brought about by modernity complicate our understanding of the present because we lack the assistance of a precedent for changes with an impact “so dramatic and so comprehensive.”⁷³ Yet the beginning of the twentieth century also marked a democratization in terms of the access to information and goods, juxtaposed to a similarly powerful concentration of style and design sources for women’s fashion chiefly around Paris.⁷⁴ The purpose of wearing garments shifted along with modernity, from emphasizing display to displaying identity, especially for women’s fashion.⁷⁵ Fashion marketing also applied these notions, using “all the attributes that are operating at expected and augmented levels” beyond the basic purposes of clothing related to modesty or protection.⁷⁶

Multilingual advertisements could also be found in the interwar Romanian press. An example is an ad for the fabric seller Scherg featured in a 1939 Bucharest cityscape guide in Romanian, German, English, and French. While the captions were not literal translations of each other, the fonts also differed: a modern font for Romanian at the top and French at the bottom, while for German and English, set between them, one reminiscent of Gothic writing. While this choice may have been purely stylistic, it can also imply an inherent cultural and geographical stereotypization. The four different languages could also suggest a variation in clientele expectation based on their primary language. This is especially relevant considering that the advertisement was placed in a map guide

with a high likelihood of foreign readership. Romanian speakers learned that “Scherg means quality,” while the German caption stated that “Scherg vouches for beauty and goodness,” the English text described its offer as “fabrics for fashionable people,” and the French assured that it was “recognized for the quality of its fabrics.” Even more, apart from the four slogans, the ad is devoid of any other identification markers, otherwise characteristic for interwar visual advertising. The possible reason may be either that the brand was recognizable enough not to necessitate more information, or a clever marketing campaign to attract attention.

Another reasonable explanation would be that this was the most Scherg could afford to pay, if considering costs by word count.⁷⁷ This advertisement likely refers to the textile factory founded in 1823 by a German drapers’ guild member, Michael Scherg, in Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó), then part of the Habsburg Empire. It was industrialized in 1870 and from 1873 it was run by Scherg’s son, Wilhelm, who began building a factory on the current location of the Carpatex textile factory. The company grew and prospered through extensive funding from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and later from the authorities of Greater Romania. Two years after becoming a joint stock company, after the Great Depression, the company leadership decided to significantly reduce worker wages. This did not affect profit margins, as Scherg contracts were mainly with the military, which assured great profits in the years leading to World War II, which may explain the austere yet multilingual marketing campaign of 1939. The company flourished throughout the war until it was nationalized in 1948 and renamed Partizanul Roşu (The Red Partisan). It was later also known as the Braşov Textile Factory or Carpatex.⁷⁸ While there is no reference to fashionable women per se, there is a high likelihood that Scherg fabrics were part of the offer in specialized or department stores.

“The Latest Parisian Models”

THE CENTRAL store of the Franco-Romanian silk factory Gallia could be found on the second floor of the Watson & Youell navigation and shipping company building in central Bucharest, on Bărăţiei Street, operating there throughout the 1930s. Its total profits rose from 8,221,754.49⁷⁹ lei reported in 1931 for 1930⁸⁰ to 122,722,822.83 lei⁸¹ reported in 1940 for 1939.⁸² The factory published an extravagant ad in the *Ilustraţiunea Română* (The Romanian illustration) 1931 Christmas issue showing a blonde model with a Marcel wave wearing a dark, silk evening gown in a pose reminiscent of

a Grecian statue, in a studio setting, between a drape and a sculpture that seems either in a modernist or unfinished classical style. Next to the image, Gallia promised “all the modern silks” created at the central Parisian location, with an addition in light of the ongoing financial crisis assuring the clientele they could access unrivalled fabrics at the most affordable prices.⁸³ This ad illustrates both the artistic and technological aspects of modernity, combining the idea of elegance and artistic prowess with industrialization and serialization.

What Paris sold most of all was luxury, intricately connected to value as a powerful manifestation of “strong and even threatening social feelings about their exclusiveness, social cost and wastefulness.”⁸⁴ The technical and social shifts brought about during modernity offered the opportunity for a wider public to access items and styles which until recently would have been reserved to the economic or social elites.⁸⁵ A wider availability of the latest fashion styles and garments could potentially disenfranchise “genuine item buyers.”⁸⁶ This prompted a rapid and firm reaction from the haute couture houses to assure a constant flow of select clients and subsequent high profit streams. The interwar era witnessed an initial opening of the Parisian fashion ideas market by allowing foreign designers and correspondents limited access to their collections with special exclusive presentations. Not everybody could attend these events as they involved a special cautionary fee. The rules were also strict about taking notes, while any sort of visual representation, even drawing, was anathema and could result in terminating access.⁸⁷ Deliveries were also heavily regulated, stores only received models a month after the regular clients. Despite all these draconian measures, information would still spread out, as copyists, oftentimes sent by department stores, were rarely caught during these fashion parades.⁸⁸ Just as in the situation emphasized by Teri Agins about middle-class Frenchwomen going to dressmakers who frequently worked with pirated designs well into the 1950s,⁸⁹ interwar Bucharesters were open to the idea of wearing unauthorized copies, as long as they reflected the leitmotif of fashion advertising, “the latest Parisian models.”

Modernity introduced the era of purported ‘fashion cities,’ of which Paris remained the reigning space for elegance throughout the modern era and beyond. Gilbert contended that the Parisian allure as a fashion city is not only due to its gathering of talent in all aspects of fashion, but also to industrial factors, namely the ongoing support for both individual and collective textile production.⁹⁰ Building on its textile craftsmanship tradition, Paris engaged in a system of constant dialogue and exchanges with the outside.⁹¹ This maintained couture as one of the most important components of the French economy for the better part of the twentieth century, garnering great profits with equally substantial investments in fashion and beauty business pursuits.⁹² Another French-Romanian



FIG. 2. The latest Parisian creations at Maryse, dresses and overcoats on Brătianu Boulevard

factory was PICA, for women's hats. A 1923 advert published in *Adevărul* advised grooms that the best way to prove their love was to offer a "Parisian form from the PICA House."⁹³ In 1924 the French-language *Tout-Bucarest: Almanach du High-Life* featured several PICA advertisements, one describing it as both a wholesale and retail store which "dictates the tone of fashion,"⁹⁴ one praising how well styled women wearing PICA hats were,⁹⁵ or one mentioning that the main location had two floors and was equipped with an elevator.⁹⁶

The "latest Parisian models" in women's fashion advertising was a usual presence, including ads for Maryse, selling dresses and overcoats,⁹⁷ or the shoe store Jean Aritonovici, vouching that its "fine footwear for ladies and gentlemen" included the latest Parisian creations.⁹⁸ Maryse was already an established name, claiming in a 1935 ad in *Le Moment* to be an "haute couture" establishment, "imposing itself" as the house where a woman "could be dressed according to her taste."⁹⁹ Interwar Romanian fashion merchants also used French cultural references for both name and branding. These included the Jeanne d'Arc store by Maison H. Dannhauer, which boasted about its offer of the "models from the great Parisian houses" in whole-page, elaborate advertisements,¹⁰⁰ *Femme Éléante*, claiming to exclusively offer "Parisian novelties" in wedding, evening and visit outfits, and textile coats with fur,¹⁰¹ the *Galeriile Parisiene* (Parisian Galleries) haberdashery,¹⁰² the *Trouville Mondain* clothes store with "exclusive Parisian specialties,"¹⁰³ the *Maison Parisienne* owned by dressmaker F. D. Papazoghu,¹⁰⁴ or *Moda pariziană* (Parisian Fashion) on Bucharest's fashionable street, Victory Avenue.¹⁰⁵ Even the Cereanu hat factory marketed itself as "assorted with the latest Parisian models" in 1929.¹⁰⁶ Among other tailors and dressmakers promising the latest Parisian fashions were Léon et Adolphe, also featured in the 1923 *Almanach du High-Life* boasting the "beautiful cut" of their

creations¹⁰⁷ as the only Parisian dressmakers in Bucharest,¹⁰⁸ thus always abreast with Parisian fashion,¹⁰⁹ declaring that to be chic, ladies should dress there.¹¹⁰ Other promotional materials included invitations to fashion parades, including an announcement from a Miss Follender who has recently returned from Paris with “the latest Parisian models.”¹¹¹ Another such return was announced by “Madame Ruleta,” the owner of the Maison Rose France haberdashery, in *Adevărul*.¹¹² The Parisul fashion house was highly publicized in the mid-interwar era. In March 1929 it announced a visit by *Miss Romania 1929*, organized by *Realitatea Ilustrată* (The illustrated reality) and affiliated to the Galveston Texas *Miss Universe*, Magda Demetrescu.¹¹³ In a 1929 advertisement published in *Realitatea Ilustrată*, Parisul fashion house presented itself as a place of daily fashion pilgrimage for the elegant Bucharesters seeking a “higher and more seductive elegance, as well as for the most difficult Ladies, always on guard for the unknown—for the sensational,” thus “assiduously prevailing over Romanian fashion.”¹¹⁴ A year later it advertised itself as the largest fashion house in Bucharest, where “every lady and miss can find at a ridiculously low price the latest original models brought from the greatest Parisian houses.”¹¹⁵

There was also an overt French presence in Bucharest, as illustrated by the heavy promotion of the Romanian branch of Aux Galeries Lafayette, banking on its original tradition and practices throughout the interwar Romanian press. Furthermore, Parisian haute couture houses advertised directly in the Romanian press, including Modes Rose Valois in 1937 in *Le Moment*¹¹⁶ or the Alexandre Picotot & Co fashion store, a partnership society and subsidiary of Parisian

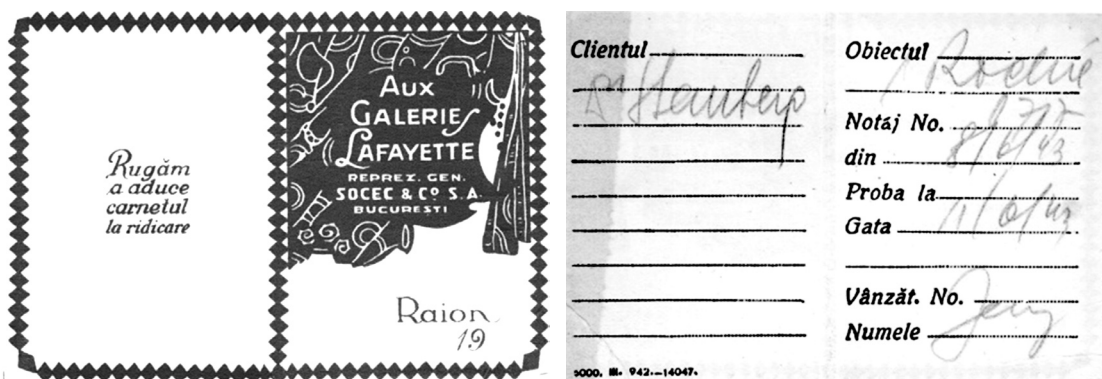


FIG. 3. Exclusivity and control practices at the Bucharest branch of Aux Galeries Lafayette. A client card must be presented for purchases on Aisle 19, the information including the client's name, the item, measurements, fitting and completion date, and seller name and number.

Maison Houbigant selling everything from photography items to combs.¹¹⁷ This designation can also be connected to an older tradition of imperial capital promotion, particularly prominent in promotional texts for Paris, London and other European capitals, which would continue as key fashion locations.¹¹⁸

The interwar era provided the basis of London's growth as a textile capital, from the place for good quality menswear to an industrial fashion hub, as opposed to the Parisian renown for creativity. As Bethan Bide put it, London "makes clothes," while Paris "makes fashion."¹¹⁹ New York and Hollywood also rose to prominence during modernity, mostly owing to the development of the film industry. Yet they maintained an interconnectedness with Paris as the main source for both material and symbolic imports.¹²⁰ Other non-Romanian names included the trademarked Milton waterproof trench coats for both men and women, with a Bucharest branch on Academiei Street, featured on the same page of the militant 1939 women's magazine *Mariana* as the Maryse advertisement.¹²¹ In 1929, I. Oslerer & Co marketed itself as a "new systematic hat factory" and announced a 10% discount for "all the student and clerk mademoiselles," with a daily offer of "new models" from Paris and Vienna.¹²² The IMEX fashion and cosmetics department store included the warehouse of the French Cotton Society in London in its haberdashery department.¹²³ The practical nature of London textiles was also a factor for La Echipamentul (At the Equipment) store, which sold autumn and winter English fabrics, "the finest from the A. Gagnière & Co House London and from other similar houses."¹²⁴

But mentions of Paris prevailed. As seen above, the Parisian myth is not confined to the borders of the French capital's cityscape. Its power of replicability lays in the idea of the borderless *esprit Parisien*, a notion encompassing the direct translation as 'spirit,' with added connotations from French alluding to 'mind' or 'wit.'¹²⁵ *La Parisienne* is then the "material embodiment of the French capital,"¹²⁶ a model accessible to all women who wish to follow the guidelines "by inhabiting a Parisian look."¹²⁷ This model could also be applied to the plethora of Eastern European artists who relocated to Paris in the interwar era,¹²⁸ one of the most visible such examples blending fine arts and fashion being Sonia Delaunay. It could then become a hyperreal abstraction of the living and breathing women physically occupying the Parisian cityscape, and its embodiments could then be described in Baudrillard's terms as "models of a real without origin or reality," produced through a process of 'simulacra.'¹²⁹ Nevertheless, in the case of the 1920s femininity model, pinpointing the origin is not as simple, as suggested by the interchangeability between the term 'flapper' with American connotations and *la garçonne*, implying a variant of the *Parisienne*. In fact, as Mary Louise Roberts suggested, this 'modern girl' of the Jazz Era was

a hybrid character materializing the blending of gendered philosophies and norms between the French and the Anglo-Saxon spaces.¹³⁰ Yet the French interpretation of the ‘modern girl’ model added *esprit* to the “plain-Jane, Anglo-American New Woman” personified by Jane Eyre-like working women in the late-nineteenth century.¹³¹ Despite the universality of *la Parisienne* and the *esprit Parisien*, the Parisian fashion industry was almost exclusively local, forcing clients and interested parties to physically be in the French capital to acquire items and ideas.¹³²

Conclusion

THE MYTH of interwar Bucharest as a ‘Little Paris’ was mainly constructed on the fashionable women occupying the public Western-friendly spaces. Interwar Bucharesters, as seen on promenades, attending lavish events or visiting entertainment or mercantile establishments, were avid consumers of anything related to the latest fashion, mainly coming from Paris, the recognized *capitale de la mode*. This created a lucrative market for advertisements directed towards the fashion-consuming, likely middle-class feminine demographic. The main themes, apart from promising exclusivity and “the latest Parisian models,” included fabric and craftsmanship quality. Particularly after the Great Depression, promotional materials also added clear statements of high quality at the lowest possible prices. Yet despite the growing political and economic unrest, fashion advertisements abounded throughout the interwar Romanian press. In this context, the 1938 image of the *Chanel No 5* perfume is ever more indicative of the contradictory features of fashionability, selling luxury while on the other hand demanding austerity. The interwar Bucharester was thus caught in this duality of having to look as glamorous as a *Parisienne* or a Hollywood movie star on the lowest possible budget. Yet the abundance of glamorous advertisements suggests a prosperous fashion and textile market in interwar Bucharest, at least on the surface. Apart from the possible discrepancies between the advertised business and its real identity, another aspect is the inherent acceptance, but rare mention, of *prêt-à-porter* items whose main appeal was their origin, Paris. In this sense the fashion-consuming Bucharester who could not afford to travel directly to Paris to acquire the latest models before everybody else, was nonetheless as much a *Parisienne* as her counterparts from the French capital. However, adding to that, she was a Bucharester at heart, divided between her home and public identity, but living her life wearing the latest Parisian models.



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Abstract

Selling Glamour: Marketing Western Women’s Fashion in Interwar Bucharest

This paper explores the dynamics of women’s fashion marketing in advertisements and promotional materials related to Western ideas, materials or products, published in interwar Bucharest. The aim is to ascertain the degree and nature of Western women’s fashion influence in interwar Romania as a reflection of larger social, political, cultural and economic phenomena at a local, regional, European and global level. The study also offers an overview of the various individuals and entities involved in the textile and fashion industry of interwar Bucharest, with various budgets and means of propagation, and possible ethical and accuracy concerns regarding their messaging. Also discussed are the major trends in interwar Romanian advertising in relation to the West, namely the import of ideas, raw materials and finished goods. The recourse to semiotics and discourse analysis offers a wider understanding of interwar Romania through the lens of fashion as marketed to interwar Bucharesters, covering all aspects relevant to the fashion industry, from conception, production and dissemination to consumption and interpretation.

Keywords

fashion, marketing, women, advertising, interwar period, Bucharest