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On the Fragmentation of Canadian Fashion: Marketing in a Global Economy

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ON THE FRAGMENTATION OF CANADIAN FASHION:

MARKETING IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

by

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Abstract

This Master's Research Paper investigates and discusses issues of regionalism in Canada and the subsequent problems related to the fashion industry due to fragmentation. The paper explores concepts of national identity as it relates to the construction of fashion capitals as a marketing tool to encourage economic growth through brand loyalty. This concept is developed to suit the current issues and needs in marketing Canadian-designed fashion domestically and globally. Twenty-two fashion professionals were interviewed and asked to discuss the current atmosphere of Canadian fashion culture, design communities, and the importance of the internet as a marketing tool; these interviews laid the foundation for a proposal of regional integration developed through an online platform with emphasis on social interaction among users.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One

1.1   Introduction

This paper investigates how fashion capitals promote and market fashion domestically and internationally through the construction of mythologies of fashion histories and cultures represented in urban spaces. The focus of this project and paper is to establish whether a unified fashion community is needed to better promote Canadian talent nationally and globally. The purpose of establishing a sense of nationalism in the Canadian fashion industry is not to reject regional subgroups, nor is it based on denying diverse ethnic identities that are intrinsic in a multicultural society, but rather to elevate these distinct identities as components in a socially constructed Canadian fashion community and to establish an industry inclusive of all Canadian fashion design.

The Canadian fashion industry is diverse and large, with Toronto and Montréal in the top six design centres in North America ranked by employment (Leslie 310). Unlike the fashion epicentres of Paris, Milan, New York, and London, Canada has no comparable fashion capital that leads the way in international trend development, media coverage, or fashion show spectacles. The symbolic ordering of cities as fashion capitals is reinforced through media coverage and the mythologizing of a city's fashion heritage and culture, two important components that establish a city's credibility as a fashion source and, ultimately, a fashion leader (Bruzzi and Gibson 9). The mythology of a fashion centre is as important in its success as the products it produces.

Due in part to the geographic demography of Canada, distinctive cultures have emerged that, while still discernibly "Canadian", differ greatly between regions; this multiplicity has limited the potential for a singular Canadian community of fashion designers to emerge and represent a secure collective cultural identity similar to what has been done in successful fashion capitals (Smith 58). Exploring the fashion histories of prominent fashion capitals, combined with primary research into the current environment in Canadian fashion as it relates to marketing domestic design, will form a comprehensive understanding of the issues that are affecting Canada's ability to foster a sense of Canadian fashion. In this paper it is suggested that the lack of cross-regional promotion and marketing has contributed to an underdeveloped Canadian design community; the segmentation of regional cultures in Canada perpetuates region-based mythologies of Canadian nationalism that reaffirm local identities and reject the identities of other regions within the same nation (Smith 58). Fragmentation prohibits a national vision of Canadian design to flourish; for Canada to become a strong leader in the fashion industry, a unified community across all regions should be explored and developed. Ultimately, the culture is the brand (Brennan and Schafer 97). Defining what Canadian culture is would enable better brand communication nationally and globally. Yet here we are faced with the problem with which we started: our geo-cultural diversity. This paper will argue that it is not through

defining what a Canadian design aesthetic should be, as if it could be one thing, but rather through the exposure of our shared multi-cultural experiences that will ultimately draw upon our commonalities and promote a cohesive fashion culture in Canada. Primary research that focused on these issues formed the basis for a strategy that is developed to promote Canadian fashion and is presented in this project as a prototype for a website called BoutiqueNation.ca.

In order for all Canadian designers to access equal promotional and marketing exposure nationwide, a Canadian fashion culture should be established in a space not limited by regional barriers: the internet. The internet is a space not defined by physical boundaries, allowing for new forms of communities to develop and grow online. This research project explores the potential for a unified Canadian design community via the internet by creating a website aimed at forming a culture and space unique to the Canadian fashion industry. The website's purpose is to serve as a platform for Canadian fashion design talent and a space that identifies designers and companies as Canadian. This website will explore issues of national identity through Canadian fashion by creating a space inclusive of Canadian design. A multiplex Canadian design aesthetic will be presented through content and interactive social tools, such as Twitter and comment boards, which will assist in engaging users and promoting a national fashion collective marketed on an international level.

In an attempt to gain an in-depth perspective on the current atmosphere of Canadian fashion, interviews, focused on issues of regionalism and national identity relating to the design community and the dissemination of fashion trends across Canada, were conducted with fashion professionals nationwide. The interviews informed the design, structure and content for BoutiqueNation.ca. By identifying current marketing issues in Canadian fashion, regional diversity, and how these might impact distribution and consumption of fashion, the interviews and subsequent website are intended to engage dialogue and establish community across the Canadian fashion industry. In doing so, BoutiqueNation.ca serves as a starting point to position Canada's fashion climate nationally.

The fashion professionals who were interviewed included fashion designers, buyers, public relations and marketing specialists, corporate employees of major Canadian brands, and magazine editors. Further, an emphasis was placed on Ontario and Québec respondents in order to reflect the current statistics of apparel labour force and head-office locations based on a Apparel Human Resources Council (AHRC) report, which states that these two provinces represent the majority of labour in the apparel sector in Canada (31).

The intent is for BoutiqueNation.ca to perform as an exploratory space for concepts of national identity, to develop Canadian-focused, fashion-centric social communities, and encourage online user interaction with Canadian fashion websites. The appeal of an online tool with social and cultural capabilities is the relatively low financial cost, as well as the speed at which information can

be created, uploaded and shared on a wide scale. For the purpose of this project, a prototype BoutiqueNation.ca was developed; included in the appendix are sitemaps that outline user pathways and sample designs for various web pages. The prototype was developed from a sociological aspect and aims to perform as a comprehensive and inclusive survey of Canadian fashion for the purpose of defining a fashion culture across Canada. BoutiqueNation.ca was designed as a public database intended for Canadian designers to post images of seasonal collections. Through the course of research and interviews, the website has been developed as an online marketing tool for designers and a cross-regional community for users. The website will maintain a large directory of Canadian designers. Ultimately, the site could be used as a component of a designer's marketing and promotion strategies, offering a cost-effective platform to help launch designers and their collections beyond geographic borders, and can create a unified Canadian culture of fashion. It will also provide inspiration for fashion editors to design magazine spreads, and buyers to determine seasonal trends and gain exposure to new Canadian designers. The website and associated research intends to uncover the marketing potential, social impact, and economic importance of using a national identity to promote Canadian design and manufacturing in the fashion industry.

1.2   Fashion Capitals

Fashion capitals are created through repeated rhetoric of sartorial preferences based on cultural indicators. It is the weaving of these components that contribute to the mythmaking of a fashion capital in order to maintain the perception of superiority, value, and brand equity in the eyes of the consumer. Fashion capitals promote and market fashion domestically and internationally through the construction of national fashion cultures, histories, and aesthetics. The four most notable fashion capitals – New York, Paris, London, and Milan – have distinct and influential fashion communities representative of the urban centre and maintained through active participation by its citizens who wear clothing definitive of the city's fashion characteristic; an act that affirms the myth that these urban centres have specific aesthetic values intrinsic in the culture. These four cities have become sanctified sites of fashion, embodying the experience and meaning of fashion for the consumer (Gilbert 9), and subsequently lending equity to the brands that carry the capital's name (Manlow 87).

The establishment of Paris as a fashion capital was strategic in its development. Prior to its rise in the eighteenth century, Parisian dress was greatly influenced by the courts of Spain (Breward 25). Court fashion was the space of spectacle and influence on the aristocratic class, and it was there that sartorial tastes spread and developed. Despite concerted efforts by Louis XIV to use fashion as a tool for self-promotion, nationalistic propaganda, and evidence of dynastic power, it wasn't until the uprising of the middle class leading up to the 1850s that Paris truly became the epicentre of

fashionability, innovative manufacturing developments, and modern marketing practices (Breward 28). Through the establishment of strict guidelines for production to achieve consistent standards of quality, France produced a culture of luxury, refinement, and exclusivity. Paris became its fashion centre because it was France's largest urban space, attracting designers, manufactures, and consumers. The modern Paris is a product of an uprising middle class who appropriated "good taste" through the establishment of *Grand Couture*, as well as of the concerted efforts of a progressive government to establish it as a superior capital via the promotion of an unparalleled entrenchment of fashion in its culture, politics, and identity (Breward 26). Paris has become a symbol of high status, aesthetic superiority, and unmatched quality. Even Louis Vuitton emphasizes its "Frenchness" in domestic and foreign markets, most obviously with the decision to default to French on its website, despite the fact that French consumers make up a very small percentage of the global luxury market (Michmann and Mazze 54). It is in this restating of its "Frenchness" that the geographic space and national culture becomes the symbolic product within the consumer experience.

Italy's fashion industry is one of the most internationally influential for accessories and prêt-a-porter. Italy's position alongside Paris and New York as the height of style and fashion production is actively maintained through the mythologizing of Italian style and culture – specifically, the imagery of Italians being very sensual and elegant dressers (Steele 2), a myth that was instrumental in developing the American market for Italian imports (Steele 16). Prior to 1950, Italy's greatest contributions to the fashion industry were high quality crafts such as fine textiles resulting from centuries of developed standards instilled through guild practices and requirements (Steele 4). It is this traditional and specialized craftsmanship combined with centralized organizations in Milan, Rome, and Florence (Steele 2) that enabled Italy to market internationally, export products which developed its fashion production, and become recognized as a global trend leader and luxury producer (Steele 117).

If there were any doubt that fashion capitals are made, one must only look at London's long struggle in establishing itself as a worthy fashion contributor among the top cities. Steeped in history and aristocracy, London's fashion environment has been similar to that of Paris; in fact, the two cities have been rivals for centuries (Gundle 55). Within the past few decades, London has gradually become an important site of fashion production and inspiration. With designers like Alexander McQueen and Vivienne Westwood, England managed to carve for itself the necessary market needed to compete internationally with Paris, New York, and Milan. England's success lay somewhat in the ideologies in which they have promoted their fashion. Once conflicted by the ambiguity of competing styles between classes, England has bridged the divide between alternative street style and upper-crust refinement to display an aesthetic quintessentially "British" (Goodrum 18). It is through the solidifying of the "British" aesthetic which has captivated an audience and consumer. Like Paris,

London has built its fashion industry on the ideologies associated with the nation and the culture of its largest urban space. Brands such as Paul Smith have reworked traditional tailored tweed suits and cliché ascots with a twist of eccentricity, indicative of youth subcultures, such as the mod scene in the 1960s, and the punk movement of the 1970s (Goodrum 113). It is the complexity of British style that has made it difficult to define "Britishness", but through the use of London as the backdrop to the consumer's fashion experience, the consumer is able to have genuine "British" experiences through the appropriation of the British look (Cova et al 11).

The American look is one that has been built on imperialism, prosperity, and modernity (Pike 201). Distinguishing itself from Paris, New York became the embodiment of American aspiration through fashion, marketing the American ideal of upward mobility and affluent lifestyles to the masses, and exploiting the potential of commercialization within fashion – a pursuit that countered the very prominence and legacy of French couture (Manlow 89). The American look existed nationally for many decades before New York managed to promote it on an international scale by the 1980s, with designers creating distinctly American looks deemed luxurious and prestigious enough to compete with French design (Manlow 86). New York's prominence as an international style leader depended initially on the local support of wealthy buyers, many of whom were of "new money" and indulged in conspicuous consumption (Gilbert 19). New York became symbolic of wealth, desire, and aspirational attainment; the designers associate themselves with this imagined city of fashion elitism, using the consumers' fantasies of New York to lend brand equity to their own labels (Gilbert 18). The American look is embodied in New York's cultural value, epitomizing the link between urban setting and fashion adornment.

As to its history, the New York Garment District has long been America's centre for apparel production; during the 1930s, the Garment District accounted for 80% of all American fashion business (Pouillard 327), and by the 1990s, New York was producing approximately a third of all women's wear goods (Rantisi 442). New York's history as a fashion city started around 1910 when designers began promoting domestic goods to combat the heavy imports of Parisian fashion and reproductions that were embraced by an American consumer. The encouraged desire for "authentic" fashion, not knock-off copies of Parisian design, was most promoted in New York, where the conditions to create a fashion centre beyond manufacturing were ideal; the Garment District was well established and its position as a financial centre enabled designers to secure financial backers and establish wealthy buyers (Pouillard 336). In addition, New York's culture was a reflection of American political and economic power, influencing the aesthetic inspiration of New York designers which would become a look symbolic of "America" (Gilbert 19). Throughout the Depression, American clothing was marketed as a symbol of patriotism through the support of domestic industries – New York's position as a fashion producer, and the development of an American look, became

more prominent (Pouillard 336). The German occupation of France during the Second World War was significant in New York's emergence in fashion design beyond the Parisian reproductions and imitations that had been adored by the American consumer for decades (Poillard 336).

It is in the histories of these fashion capitals to which Canada must look in order to understand its current place in the fashion order. Considering the contributing factors that set Paris, Milan, London, and New York on very different paths within the fashion industry will assist in identifying current issues and areas of opportunity in order to effectively develop a strategy for future growth and establish a cohesive vision of Canadian fashion.

1.3   Fashion Heritage

Individual fashion consumption is motivated by emotions, attitudes, and previous experiences related to self-image (Michman and Mazze 35); the urban setting becomes the space in which to signify one's aesthetic value, status, and sartorial repertoire. The fashion city becomes the object of consumption *in situ* (Bruzzi and Gibson 18). Through the branding of goods as city- or nation-oriented, the consumer "experiences" the status and culture associated with the fashion capital. It is the novelty of aspirational consumption that defines the current hierarchal trajectory of fashion capitals and consumer preferences in a global economy.

Unlike the aforementioned fashion capitals, Canada has not managed to carve a niche in the fashion market through differentiation of distinctive trends, expert craftsmanship, or international label recognition, nor has it produced a centre that reflects a strong design community representative of the nation's best talent. Though a centralized organization does exist in the form of the AHRC – a sector council funded by the Canadian government and intended to encourage the apparel sector in economic development through human resource support – it is apparent that a divergence in the national mandate of the AHRC exists due to its location in Montréal, Québec, a province that accounts for 50% of the apparel industry labour force in Canada, versus Ontario's 33%, followed by British Columbia with 10% (AHRC 81). Moreover, Canada's most noted fashion centres, Montréal and Toronto, don't reflect the entire landscape of Canadian culture and fashion, nor does the centralization of fashion in Canada's east reflect the emergence of Vancouver's strong presence, thus leaving Canadian design fragmented by regional cultures, the borders of which are emphasized through the disparity of government funding, media attention, and national recognition.

The geographic dispersion of urban centres has led to the development of insular cultures, which have contributed to a fractured concept of Canadian nationalism and identity due to conflicting ideologies of "Canadian" seen through regional lenses. This is to say that unlike New York or Paris,

which have clear fashion cultures, histories, and identifiable characteristics of national aesthetic preferences, Canada has not developed a cohesive nation-based fashion identity that reflects existing aesthetic values and production capabilities. Nation-based fashion identities are developed through the mythmaking of a fashion heritage. Heritage implies authenticity through longevity, predicating the current generation of discerning consumers and validating the perceived entrenchment of fashion in the construct of a nation's culture.

The purpose of heritage brands is not to label each designer or company as distinctly "Canadian", instead it is intended for the consumer to associate that designer or company with the quality and characteristics associated with a country's culture, heritage, and craftsmanship as it relates to fashion. The brand, through association, becomes synonymous with the characteristics representative of the fashion capital or national heritage. The influence geography has in fashion may not be readily evident to consumers, but it plays a critical role in both consumption and marketing. Clothing, beyond its utilitarian functionality, relies on certain social and economic structures that support the superfluous nature of adornment and decoration found in fashion (Steele, 3); naturally, then, urban centres have long been the hubs of fashion consumption quite simply for the availability and assortment of products. Consumption is critical to the profit and success of fashion businesses; it therefore is a logical progression that where more consumers are located, so too will there be more fashion products sold. But in terms of marketing, the geography of fashion is often subtly woven through the fashion brand and conveyed to the consumer through media outlets, marketing campaigns, and even brand names, such as DKNY (Donna Karen New York), Rimmel London, or Hermès Paris. The inclusion of the city name is arguably as important, if not more, in establishing the perceived prominence and value of the product.

In a global fashion economy that promotes the homogenization of style, Canadian fashion brands and designers face the issue of how to stand out from the global pack. Several brands, such as Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), Holt Renfrew, and Roots, have been successful in overcoming issues of regionalism in Canada and have contributed to the nations' collective identity while simultaneously reflecting a Canadian fashion identity internationally. These companies have established themselves as uniquely Canadian: they have maintained Canada as their headquarters and have each promoted a Canadian identity through their branding and marketing. Further, they have branded a Canadian identity within their products, aesthetics, and business culture, creating a sense of community and belonging. These companies serve as models of achieving success through the creation of a Canadian community and a subsequent Canadian identity. At over 340 and 175 years old, HBC and Holt Renfrew, respectively, are indeed heritage brands. Further, both Roots and HBC market the celebration of anniversaries and include year of instatement in branding and marketing; both brands use animals also found on Canadian coins – HBC, a stag, and Roots, a beaver – in their logo. It is

evident that they draw on the history and culture of Canada in order to drive consumer loyalty through perceived product authenticity based on the attributed values and concepts of its associated legacy. Heritage and legacy suggests a level of quality and design intrinsic to artisanal craftsmanship, something that is becoming more desired in recent economic times as conspicuous consumption is being reconsidered by the value-conscious consumer in Canada (AHRC 65).

What these companies have successfully done is market "nationalism" as a concept of authenticity and quality to the consumer while maintaining a product that is not inherently Canadian. To clarify, Roots, for example, has communicated its visual presence through a distinct Canadian lens; it is this image that persuades Canadians to consider Roots products as unique or more authentic to merchandise equivalent in quality and design, but missing the desired brand image (Cato 5). It is the brand image that is translated by the consumer into an identity. Regionalism fragments the national image into regionalized characteristics, prohibiting Canadian brands from readily marketing themselves as Canadian. What large department stores like the Bay and Holt Renfrew have done for Canadian fashion is establish within their own branding a perception of Canadian identity recognizable to the consumer, and all other products sold there, by association to the department store brand, by supporting the imagined image of Canadian aesthetics, lifestyle, and ideologies.

1.4   Community: Forming Fashion Cultures Through Communication

There is a natural hierarchy of fashion cities understood in contemporary consumer culture, with Paris as the international fashion capital (Steele 7). But this hierarchy is not necessarily a product of a city's natural pool of talent, nor is it conditioned by the products therein produced. A city like Paris or New York becomes a fashion centre and leader through the perpetuation of mythologies that portray the urban space as an embodied experience of high fashion (Bruzzi and Gibson 9). It is these repeated mythologies that the consumer associates with the products they consume, and, in effect, develop emotional connections to the familiar signifiers of geographical spaces or cultural heritage in which they associate, exercise, and project their own identity (Cova et al 33). It is essential for the Canadian fashion industry to be informed by how the current fashion capitals achieved and maintained their success so that effective methods for marketing can be adapted into strategic plans that will promote Canadian fashion domestically and internationally.

The importance of community in developing fashion capitals is the communicative aspect, which promotes fashion via word of mouth, visual trend cues, and the meaning attributed to products or concepts through collective interpretation and acceptance. Community has traditionally been emphasized as a physically-rooted space, but if the context of community is predicated on the

substance and meaning of the communication that evolves through a network of personal relationships based on shared interests, then virtual spaces not only have the potential to provide the same space for communities to flourish (Toder-Alon et al 10), but can do so across borders, bringing together people who would not otherwise be able to communicate in another way (Boush and Kahle 105).

The communication component of community-forming, whether a visual cue, content, or contextual, is key in the development of online community forming as well, therefore, exploring the potential to create a web-based cross-regional fashion culture for Canadians is a viable alternative to the current issues of fragmentation that permeates the national landscape due to cultural insulation. The internet provides a "middle landscape" for the separation and connectedness of Canadians (Toder-Alon et al 20). Through online participation, users maintain and showcase their individuality by exercising their preferences and opinions with social tools such as "like" buttons or the creation of user profiles; simultaneously, the characteristics and attributes of engaging in a community as a member are embraced by the user as shared commonalities. It is through user interaction and engagement with the social tools provided, the development of relationships with other users through comments boards, and the "following" options that communication is fostered and the online equivalent of word-of-mouth is exercised. The value word-of-mouth has in communicating new products to a diverse range of people increases exponentially via the internet because of its borderless reach. Word-of-mouth is a valuable component of marketing as it is based on the trust between consumers, whose regard and esteem for the opinions of those they consider influential or important affects the choices one might later make during purchases (Schindler and Bickart 36). Consumers learn about new products and gauge their value from their experience interacting with other people or in specific environments. Whether based in physical or virtual spaces, communication results in the transference of information and the inferred meaning of symbols and signs within contexts (Daugherty et al 457). Therefore, the development of fashion cultures is based on communication among its members and the consumption of fashion that is symbolic of the myths, values, and characteristic ascribed to a specific urban or national space.

The fashion capitals that have been discussed are indicative of not only the urban space they inhabit, but also the national aesthetic: "British", "French", "Italian", and "American". The role of categorizing fashion through national "looks" is to create a perception of value between products with relatively similar functional and aesthetic characteristics but produced by competing national fashion industries through marketing the differentiation and superiority of national products over others in order to drive consumption (Arnold 6). The association of national or urban characteristics with the fashion produced therein influences consumer perceptions through associative priming (Murray and Haubl 274). Therefore, the impact of defining national or urban characteristics in order to market fashion is important in driving the consumption of national goods. The urban centres with which these

aesthetics are associated perform as the embodiment of distinctive national "looks", giving the consumer context to communicate their fashion choices (Arnold 202). The fashion capital becomes an urban space in which the characteristics of the national aesthetic and identity are prescribed and exercised regularly because of the availability and assortment of products.

Despite the historical success of fashion capitals as the drivers for marketing national fashion industries, this model does not work in Canada. As discussed, national identity and aesthetics plays an important role in associative consumption and perceived value of products, and therefore is relevant in the discussion of Canadian fashion. Rather than emphasizing the cultural diversities of urban centres, a cohesive vision of Canadian fashion must be established in order to develop a similar nation-based marketing platform that has proven successful for the aforementioned countries. The internet provides the needed space to create a fashion community that is not limited to the perceived borders that define regional diversities for Canadians. Using the internet to create a vision of the national aesthetic through the participation of Canadians in an online community will develop a unified culture of fashion that pulls together and emphasizes core characteristics that are definitive of Canadian fashion.

Chapter Two

<u>2.1   Literature Review</u>

The literature that has been reviewed to date has formed a broad overview of the promotion and marketing of the fashion industry as it relates to the development of fashion cultures. Concepts of Canadian identity are explored, which is often defined as a milieu of competing regional cultures and diversities. The research has followed two strands: the fashion industry and Canadian identity. Articles included below have assisted in formulating my research questions and the development of this project's methodologies.

In Leslie and Rantisi's article "Governing the Design Economy in Montréal, Canada", the creation and maintenance of Québec's identity and culture through its institutions, policies and industries are explored. They posit that the success of the design industry was made possible through the establishment of an identifiable Québecois culture, specifically in Montréal. This article supports the impact of regional diversity in Canada, which has prohibited the formation of a unified national identity in the design industry. Fashion is the result of mass consumption, and mass consumption is primarily urban; so in order to achieve success in an urban setting a definable culture must exist that reflects the identity of the city. Further, the fashion from the urban centre must reflect the wants and needs of a market much larger than its own. This is to say: in order for Canada to produce a "Fashion Capital" it must have a capital representative of Canadian culture. While Montréal maintains its position as a fashionable city, it is by no means representative of Canada, nor does it rival major fashion capitals internationally.

David B. Knight's research into regionalism and national identity offers insight into how and why communities form. In the article "Identity and Territory: Geographical Perspectives on Nationalism and Regionalism", Knight suggests that communities are based on their cultures and the social relations that are formed between their members. He discusses Canada's identity crisis as a result of fragmented cultures and regionalized "nationalism". That is to say, due to Canada's size, Canadians develop communities and cultures within their regions, rather than across their nation. Knight's article is valuable in determining how communities and cultures are formed and the need an individual has for belonging to an identity greater than their self.

Additional literature that supports the issues of defining a national identity due to the power of regional identities is Cory Willmott's article "Designing, Producing and Enacting Nationalisms: Contemporary Amerindian Fashions in Canada", which examines the meaning of ethnicity in dress and discusses the role cultural identity plays in promoting a niche fashion market. The issue at hand is not that Canada is a country made up of several cultures and ethnicities, rather that there is no umbrella under which they all fall that is considered "Canadian". In "Dress and Globalisation",

Margaret Maynard discusses the importance of "sameness" in fashion in order to achieve widespread success. If "sameness" is necessary for global success, then there is no place for multiple ethnic forms of dress. This proves problematic for establishing a unified identity in Canada, which is composed of many ethnicities. In fact, Canada is known for its multiculturalism and diverse ethnicities and, as such, establishing a sense of "sameness" could be problematic.

The body of research that informs this paper has made clear that identifying with a group creates unity and loyalty to the politics and theology of that group. Nations are built on the promotion of group identity, suggesting that finding similarities between individuals is more important that stressing differences, unless outside of the group. Clothing plays an important role in communicating membership within a specific group through the manifestation of real or imagined cultural ideas and ideals (McCracken 59). As previously discussed, Roots manifests the imagined lifestyle of Canadians as outdoor explorers, hunters, and lumberjacks through various motifs, textiles patterns, materials and overall brand imaging. It is through the clothing that Roots establishes a distinctive Canadian culture, which, whether (in)accurate of modern Canadian life, represents a lifestyle that is significant in Canada to Canadians.

Currently, Canada faces the issue that regional identity has a stronger hold on individuals than a national unified identity. Due to geographical barriers, individuals struggle to identify with groups outside their physical boundaries, creating fragmented groups of Canadians across Canada. This fragmentation hinders a unified fashion identity in Canada. Wilmott explores this issue most clearly, explaining that individuals outside a group based on ethnicity and/or region cannot relate to the identity of the group's members. As individuals relating to one another, it becomes a case of what we are not, rather than what we all share in common.

Many researchers have explored how fashion affects national identity. Joshua Miller points out in his article "Fashion and Democratic Relationships" that citizens divided by wealth or status may not see themselves as members of a common identity, but their clothes have the possibility of linking them together. Anthony D. Smith takes this idea further by asserting that identity is based on mythologies of common shared experiences, which aim to solidify a person's role in a relationship, community, region, nation, and world. Smith suggests in his article "National Identity and the Idea of European Unity" that through the participation of a national collective in a unified identity, a nation can better position itself against separatism and strengthen its economy and political stance on a global level. These articles are valuable in understanding the role fashion plays in national solidarity among regions. An identifiable national aesthetic can create unity among citizens who otherwise share little in common. Separatism has been an issue predominantly in Québec; if fashion, as suggested by Smith, can unite regions faced with adversity by establishing commonality with bordering regions,

then the study into Canadian fashion and issues of regional separatism and national identity should be explored and researched.

An important element in the Canadian and global fashion industries is the prominence of *Fashion Television*. *Fashion Television* managed to create relevant, watch-worthy, editorial-style segments on fashion designers and brands from around the world. Many brands found success after having their collections or designer featured on the show. Despite being a Canadian-produced program and being aired internationally in the U.S. A. and Europe, *Fashion Television* didn't manage to put Canadian fashion on the map. Due to the competing fashion centres of Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver, there is no centre on which to focus Canadian fashion profiles; so the Canadian fashion scene remains disjointed.

Finally, Robert O'Byrne's book *Style City: How London Became a Fashion Capital* details the troubles and successes of London's fashion industry. This book is important in understanding the development of a fashion capital and defining a fashion culture in England. Marketing and branding techniques are discussed in regard to individual designers and the British design collective. An important aspect of creating a fashion capital, as aforementioned, is an urban centre with a definable culture. By comparing Toronto and Montréal to London, the fashion industry in Canada can be better understood by way of how to properly establish a reputation for consistently marketable and valuable fashion.

During the course of research for this paper it became evident that, in Canada, little contemporary consideration has been given to the importance mythmaking plays in establishing and maintaining the success of fashion capitals, nor to the economic drive fashion capitals have on domestic design and production of clothing. If fashion capitals are based on notions of community, participants must engage in perpetuating their fashion culture and the myth of a fashion legacy through the performance of adorning aesthetic styles associated with the characteristics of that urban centre. Additional primary research was performed in order to offer a contemporary and relevant understanding of regionalism in Canadian fashion and its impact on the development of a fashion capital or unified fashion community across the nation intended to promote Canadian consumer loyalty and support of domestically designed clothes. The literature reviewed offers a starting point in understanding the impact fashion has on stabilizing and unifying citizens within a nation, and, further, its role in drawing commonalities between people with otherwise disparate lives.

2.2   Competitive Analysis: Online Databases and Blogs

In considering approaches to the website BoutiqueNation.ca, it is important to assess existing
Canadian fashion-related blogs and websites and to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of
accessibility, navigation, and content. The blogs and websites selected for review are predominantly
from Montréal and Toronto, with select sites from Calgary, Vancouver, and Ottawa. These urban
centres were chosen based on population, the prominence of their respective fashion weeks in Canada,
the majority of national media outlets and publications' location, the situation of the majority of the
labour force within the fashion industry, and their representation of Canada's duality in languages as
well as cultural influence by Europe and America. Additionally, both Toronto and Montréal are strong
representations of the issues related to regionalism in Canada, evidenced in their nationally
recognized prominence as Canadian fashion hubs despite distinct insular cultures reflective of their
urban centres.

Blogs represent fashion cultures in urban centres from a subjective perspective. Their role in
the Canadian fashion landscape is one that reflects the sartorial preferences of the blogger, the readers,
and the members of that culture featured in "street style" posts. By reviewing Canadian-focused
fashion blogs across four distinct urban centres – Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary, and Vancouver – a
tapestry of Canadian fashion is woven, offering a better understanding of how fashion is approached
in these urban centres and whether fashion values and preferences vary throughout regions.
Evaluating how fashion is approached through the analysis of successful Canadian-focused fashion
blogs will assist in determining how these segmented regions can be united into a national fashion
identity. The blogs reviewed were chosen based on national popularity, as well as the city on which
most of the content was focused.

Geographic space contributes to regionalised cultures distinct to city centres and provinces;
the blogs analyzed, to follow, echo issues of regionalism in Canadian fashion since many blogs focus
narrowly on one Canadian city. The blogs effectively define city fashion and culture but do not
investigate fashion on a national level; instead most of the content includes international collections,
fashion shows, and trends. The jump from city to international fashion contributes to the segmentation
in Canada and perpetuates the notion that national or cross-regional fashion is irrelevant within
distinct cultural regions or, according to the bloggers, simply does not exist.

Little research has been published on the relationship between Canadian identity, fashion and
the issue of fragmentation in Canada. The lack of research into this area has limited the understanding
of how to communicate Canadian fashion to Canadians and the world at large. The Canadian websites
evaluated, to follow, are the most popular designer databases and blogs that promote Canadian
fashion and trends. Three issues will be examined: accessibility, navigation, and regionalism.

Access to and accessibility of Content

An important consideration in website and database design is the public access for non-members; private or exclusive websites prevent the dissemination of Canadian fashion and limit the public user's access to fashion information. Additionally, language presents a major contributor to the restriction of information dissemination across regional borders. Despite two official languages in Canada, many sites are written in unilingual English, an issue for the Canadian Francophone.

Membership is a requirement found on several websites that host large databases used to network, such as Toronto Fashion Incubator (TFI) and Fashion Group International (FGI). Access to these sites is restricted to users with affiliation in the fashion industry and users must first go through an application process. Accessibility presents an important component in defining the parameters for who can view the information on a website; partially or exclusively "members only" content alienates non-members. The criteria often applied to becoming a member is restrictive to limit the number of applicants successful in gaining membership; the application to access the database on fashionincubator.com specifies a member must be a fashion professional with credentials in order to join the database and networking portals. FGI, Toronto Chapter (http://fgitorontomembers.org.memberlodge.org/), also requires membership status to access its fashion databases. Application requests were sent to TFI and FGI to learn what the process of membership entails, as well as to review the member-access-only portion of the site. All application attempts for FGI went unanswered both by the Toronto Chapter and the New York head office, making this site's accessibility issues more pronounced. Access to the TFI website was acquired for a 24-hour review period. Upon reviewing the TFI, critical inaccuracies arose which substantially affects the credibility of the site; beyond the exclusivity of membership status and the attributed membership cost, much of the information contained in the database was out of date, listing one fashion journalist as editor-in-chief of one of Canada's most prominent magazines, despite not having held that position for nearly two years. The exclusivity of sites like TGI suggest they maintain valuable information and provide highly coveted information; the dissemination of information should be widely accessible and up to date, which would not only increase fashion knowledge among public users, but also improve necessary feedback regarding inaccurate information.

Similar search and membership issues were found on apparel.ca, run by the Canadian Apparel Federation. The website is restricted to users whose membership is supported by an affiliated fashion business. Without an affiliated fashion business I was denied membership. Accessibility issues restrict public access to Canadian design; therefore the promotion of Canadian design on members-only sites becomes more difficult.

Navigation

Navigation problems can cause issues in retrieving information from websites. Canadian magazine *Flare* has created a designer directory on its web counterpart flare.com. The designer database titled "Canadian Designer Directory" (http://www.flare.com/fashion/directory), lists a variety of Canadian designers and fashion labels. At the time of review, the format of the database is presented with the designer names listed in alphabetical order. Alphabetical listings are helpful if the user is already familiar with a name, but this can restrict the potential to learn about new designers without the inclusion of additional parameters like search categories, price range or style. In addition to the alphabetical lists' hindrance on exploration-potential of databases, *Flare*'s directory navigates the user away from the site when a designer is selected: the designer profile pages offer little information on each designer, and instead link to the designer's site. The imposed redirection to off-site content for additional details and collections becomes an unnecessary step in accessing designer information. Given that the user must already know the designer's name in an alphabetical listing, and that they are then redirected suggests *Flare*'s database is a formality attempting to promote Canadian design, but performs as a poorly kempt search engine. The limitations of the database on flare.com currently make this directory ineffective in the promotion of Canadian design.

Regionalism

Regionalism in Canada presents a conflict in how Canadian fashion is viewed from several city centres across Canada. Blogs are social platforms used to express ideas: bloggers have become distributors of information for fashion and pop culture and are sometimes seen as authorities on fashion. Contributors have distinct perspectives of fashion based on their immediate urban culture. In relation to blogs focusing on Canadian fashion, the most popular is TorontoStreetFashion.com. This blog is run by several contributors and was established in 2005. Its creator, Rachel Schwab, credits the lack of current fashion news and information and its subsequent dissemination of Toronto street style in an accessible medium as the purpose for creating this blog. The site mostly focuses on fashion events but also provides reviews of Canadian designers. There is no directory to search for specific styles or designers, although the archives date back to 2005 and is a fairly important documentation of Toronto's fashion history and transformation. The blog takes on a more sociological look at fashion and the intrinsic impact of fashion on the zeitgeist of Toronto culture.

TorontoStreetFashion.com is fairly representative of many of the Canadian fashion blogs: an exploration of current trends and pushing fashion limits in everyday life for fashion voyeurs to study, critique, and sometimes mimic. The blogs, like ahautemess.ca from Vancouver, calgaryfashion.ca

from Calgary, and torontotextstyles.blogspot.com from Toronto all feature surveys of city fashion in Canada. Blogs document and discuss current fashion as it applies within a specific cultural landscape. The blogs reviewed here are predominantly focused on Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver fashion cultures; each reflect fashion throughout Canada, but fail to investigate Canadian fashion on a national scale. The issue in reducing fashion to a regional milieu is that it excludes the rest of Canada from the fashion discussion.

Both blogs and database websites offer little in the way of presenting a Canadian culture of fashion by promoting Canadian fashion designers. In many blogs, the fashion is reviewed as a commentary on style rather than exploring what Canadian fashion can encompass; often times, Canadian fashion isn't included and content focuses on international designers. The Canadian aspect for many of these blogs is Canadians *wearing* fashion, not Canadian fashion itself. Canadian blog Fashionism.ca lists their 15 must-read Canadian fashion blogs; a list aimed at supporting the position that blogs make fashion news readily accessible, and are a "great way to keep up with the latest styles and trends". But in several of the blogs that made it onto this Canadian-centric list – like Shopsterium.com and fifthsparrow.blogspot.ca – the content rarely discussed Canadian designers, or promoted Canadian fashion. Street style blogs are widely successful and do promote the fashion culture within a city, but they often focus on narrow subcultures, like the subversive "hipsters" trend that are prominently featured on torontostreetstyle.com and Vancouver blog stylequotient.ca, neglecting the broader culture and story of fashion within these urban spaces and across Canada. The list of top Canadian fashion blogs by fashionism.ca hinges on the author of the site being Canadian, and not necessarily promoting Canadian fashion; therefore it must be questioned whether Canadian-oriented fashion blogs are relevant if they predominantly feature global brands or regional aesthetics. These blogs are not necessarily promoting Canadian fashion, but fashion in general, and therefore, the Canadian component of these blogs is misleading.

Canadian fashion websites should incorporate regionalized search options in the navigation tool; regionalism is an important tool for consumers and fashion professionals to identify varying Canadian styles in dress and aesthetics. This method at first may seem to counter the position of this research project, that a national fashion identity in Canada is the necessary to promote Canadian fashion on a national and international scale; but it is important for each region to become aware and engaged with other regions in Canada. This can be achieved by including regional searches in the navigation. Flare.com fails at categorizing designers in an accessible manner, missing the opportunity to use an online platform with national reach and national circulation via its published counterpart to promote Canadian design effectively. If regionalism insulates cultures through the perception of exclusive experiences of fashion and self-image by members of these spaces, then approaches to the dissemination of fashion by alphabetical listings will prove ineffective in promoting designers who

have not broken into all regional markets. Users on databases like Flare's will be limited to using familiarity of names to perform searches, an approach that enforces unawareness of designers outside user regions. Subsequently, perceptions of regional fashion, rather than national, are maintained and perpetuated.

Chapter Three

3.1   Primary Research

Interviews were conducted with fashion designers and industry professionals in Montréal, Toronto, and Ottawa to gain perspective on the regional diversities and similarities across Canada. The interview questions also addressed the domestic marketing and promotion methods to identify the problem areas of the marketing system specific to Canada. The interviews provided insight to the regional diversities that designers and the fashion industry in Canada face and determined the current needs designers have in promoting and branding their fashion businesses as Canadian. The questions were open to allow for the conversation to take a natural path; a standard set of questions was created to ensure a consistent theme in the interviews and maintain the integrity of the research. Most interviews were conducted via email correspondence in order to secure a cross-regional survey of the opinions of fashion professions. The interviews addressed questions related to the following:

Regionalism, Nationalism and Identity

Do you identify as Canadian? How important, if at all, is being/not being Canadian to your identity?

How does being Canadian affect your designs and business?

How does working in Canada affect your designs and business?

Do you think Canada has a fashion culture? If so, can you describe it?

Design Community

How would you define a design community?

Do you belong to a design community?

How would you describe the design community you belong to or that exists in your area/city?

Do you feel a design community is vital for the growth of the fashion industry?

Fashion Industry in Canada

Can you describe for me where Canada fits internationally in the fashion industry?

Does buying "Canadian" matter to you? Why or why not?

Are there any benefits or drawbacks to buying:

Canadian-designed products?

Canadian-made products?

Can you elaborate?

Approximately 30 fashion industry professionals were invited to participate in the interviews; 22 responded to questions via email, telephone, or in-person. Fashion professionals were the targeted respondents rather than fashion consumers. This was predominantly intended to maintain the perspective of how fashion is marketed to consumers, rather than interpreted by consumers. The sampling was a diverse range of fashion industry professionals, including designers, marketers, publicists, and merchandisers. A small sampling was chosen to allow for better synthesis of my information, as many of the questions were specifically phrased to allow for in-depth responses. The interviews remained fairly open to accommodate the variance in the participants' professional experiences and allow for unforeseen areas of discussion to be addressed. The participants offered their own perspective on whether community and culture is relevant on a national level for the fashion community in Canada.

The interviews informed the content, structure and design of the BoutiqueNation.ca. These also help guide the creative direction and information architecture of the website and informed the development of specific features to help promote Canadian designers.

3.2   Analysis of Findings

The purpose of collecting qualitative primary data, as briefly mentioned in Chapter One, was to inform the design and content of BoutiqueNation.ca and confirm (or refute) the position this paper has taken on the current state of Canadian regionalism and its effect on Canadian fashion identity. The questions were developed to engage the respondents as professionals in the fashion industry in order to develop a clear understanding of contemporary marketing and promotion techniques currently being used in Canadian companies to engage Canadian consumers. Due to the individual experiences of the respondents in the fashion industry as Canadians and the nature of fashion as a cultural phenomenon, the approach used in the interview and analysis stage was interpretive. Through the use of interpretive analysis, the interviews could remain open-ended and encourage respondents to answer questions according to their own experiences. Through the analysis of these experiences, trends appeared that helped define the current atmosphere of Canadian fashion and help us understand the current marketing approaches and strategic plans used to promote Canadian designers and companies.

Using interpretive methods for analysing the data collected, the responses were sorted into themes based on the original intent of the line of questioning as well as additional information that was presented through the course of the interviews. Despite the variance in the careers and professional experience of the respondents, consistencies and trends emerged that formed a clear understanding of the current state of Canadian fashion, how Canadian consumers engage with various marketing practices, and the role national identity and heritage plays in consumer shopping trends and consumption preferences.

3.3   Secondary Research

Secondary research was used to support and guide the direction of the website. Materials used included publications from academic journal and books; manuals and studies on website development; user interaction and trends in blogs and online communities; and data acquired from government-funded reports and surveys such as from Statistics Canada and AHRC. Several participants from the interview portion of the research cited studies, books, and websites as supplementation for their current understanding of Canadian and global fashion. All resources cited during the interviews were researched and checked against the assertions made by the respondents.

Chapter Four

<u>4.1   Interviews and Analysis</u>

Interviews were conducted with fashion professionals whose head offices were based in Montréal, Ottawa, or Toronto. The sample was selected to reflect the current fashion environment in Canada which is influenced greatly by the cultures entrenched in both national languages. This is relevant to all Canadians and is best represented in Ontario and Québec, where many of the head-offices of national fashion companies are located. Though the location of the respondents is indicative of only an eastern-centric opinion, their roles within Canadian fashion are on a national level and therefore represent a contemporary and well-formed understanding of the Canadian fashion and design industry. In total, 22 individuals were interviewed. The participants' careers were varied and are listed as follows:

- 5 Creative Directors of Canadian-based brands
- 4 Marketing and Communications specialists
- 3 Directors of government-funded fashion divisions/groups
- 3 Public Relations specialists
- 2 Editors-in-Chief of major national publications
- 2 Executive Merchandisers
- 1 Marketing Executive of a national publication house
- 1 Director of Development for major retail centres
- 1 Owner of a retail chain specializing in Canadian-designed clothing

The information gathered from these participants is intended to be used to develop an understanding of how Canadian fashion is perceived and consumed within Canada. The participants were asked questions which pertained specifically to issues of regionalism, national identity, fashion consumption via the internet, and the influence design communities have on developing fashion cultures.

<u>4.2   Regionalism and the Boutique Culture</u>

The first series of questions the respondents were asked dealt with concepts of regional identity and how these identities translate into the marketability of clothing across Canadian regional markets. Many of the respondents represent national brands, retailers and companies which sell Canadian clothing, therefore, their observation of regional variances in consumer perception of Canadian-made clothing is important in understanding how disparate regional identities can shadow a unified vision of "Canadian".

Canada is geographically large, with a relatively small population. Further, the population is dispersed, forming distinct regions centred on major metropolises. It is in these metropolises, such as Toronto and Montréal, where distinct, insular fashion cultures have developed. These urban centres have developed into large fashion communities, accounting for a large percentage of the fashion industry's labour force, and resulting in an output of clothing definitive of its region, rather than of nation.

A respondent from the government asserted that it is easier to export to the U.S.A. than to different Canadian regions. This statement was in reference to the AHRC report regarding Canadian produced clothing sold in Canada and exported to U.S.A. Specifically, this respondent referred to the statistics that showed the Canadian retail industry is made up of a mere 21% of Canadian-made clothing with all other clothing being imported from off-shore manufacturers (34). Of the 24% of all exported domestically-produced clothing, 84% are U.S.A.-bound (33), totalling 20% of the Canadian-made market.

Many respondents offered reasons why Canadians are not buying its own fashion, with the most common answer being there aren't enough Canadian consumers to warrant mass production of Canadian collections to be sold domestically. This statement isn't applicable to every Canadian designer, as many have been highly successful, including Lida Baday and lululemon, but instead applies to the majority trying to build successful brands. The issue that arises more often is retaining large scale orders for Canadian designer collections. There is little demand for unknown designers, regardless of their nationality. Further, Canada is subject to a fashion environment that is difficult to penetrate; it is costly to ship goods across such an expansive country, and since the population is small, the consumer numbers won't often warrant large production runs. These two factors create barriers for entry into the marketplace for many Canadian designers.

To overcome the costly issues associated with urban dispersion in Canada, designers often sell to boutiques within their immediate region. This strategy is not necessarily detrimental to the development of a designer's brand in terms of limiting the potential consumer to a region-based profile. The future growth of the designer's business is impacted negatively if they cannot move beyond the regional geographic borders and sell throughout Canada. In fact, developing an association with certain regions can create a positive perception in the mind of the consumer based on pre-existing concepts of that region's values, style, culture and legacy. Several respondents suggested that it is the saturation of talent within small regional spaces that validates the worth of these designers in the mind of the consumer. For instance, it is difficult for a designer from northern Ontario to create a viable business within that isolated region, due to limitations in market size. Outside of that region, the designer will have further difficulty establishing themselves as a credible talent among recognized designers already flourishing in urban centres. It is therefore necessary for designers to join

established regional design communities, like Montréal, in order to build their business and marketability on pre-existing ideas of that regions culture and fashion, and through the association of successful designers also from that community. Most of the respondents identified Montréal- and Toronto-based designers as members of highly respected fashion communities, and who would therefore be more desirable in the eye of the consumer. When pressed with the status of Vancouver's designers and fashion community being on par or quickly catching up to Montréal and Toronto, the issue of legacy became evident as most respondents claimed Vancouver's fashion scene was too young to be considered relevant or influential to Canada's fashion landscape.

A strong boutique culture has developed within Canada, with many offering Canadian-designed fashion. The boutique has become the destination for consumers looking for unique pieces, a feat that can sometimes be difficult in a culture built upon mass consumption and brand power. Canadian designers, limited in their production runs, often manufacture one-offs or limited pieces, which in a boutique setting is ideal. In fact, the exclusivity of boutique merchandise is what creates consumer demand. In this sense, it is through the boutiques' own branding and customer base that a Canadian designer selling there might create their own brand association and credibility. Boutiques have become resources for Canadian designers to market themselves. But boutiques often operate as local retail depots, not nationally recognized destination shops; a designer's consumer reach and appeal goes only so far as the boutique can secure. Recognizing this very issue within Toronto, the municipal government has developed *Shop Toronto*, a campaign aimed at promoting regional talent. With strategic placement of Toronto designer features written as editorial pieces within tourist magazines, the program targets visitors to the city who are interested in having a "genuine" Toronto experience. A list of boutiques offering wide assortments of Toronto- and Canadian-designed fashion is offered within these magazines and on the Toronto.ca website. It is the boutique, then, that is becoming a valuable component of delivering Canadian fashion to Canadians. This ties back to BoutiqueNation.ca's name and purpose.

4.3   Branding: Canada and the Bridge Between U.S.A and Europe

A question posed to each of the respondents was whether "Canadian" was important to the consumer when considering buying a garment. Surprisingly, to varying degrees, all respondents claimed it was not the most important component of the product. Many respondents elaborated, citing that quality, price, and aesthetics play a much more influential role in a consumer's purchasing decision. A tendency toward global fashion was mentioned by several respondents, asserting that the Canadian consumer is much more on trend with international styling and brands; due to Canada's lacking fashion culture or legacy relative to Italy, France, or even England, marketing a product

predominantly on its domestic production will not draw upon aspiration motivators nor imply standards of quality associated with a history of domestic production.

Several respondents asserted that fashion is a global industry, therefore it must be designed with the global consumer in mind. The respondent who owns a retail chain, which carries predominantly Canadian-made clothing, suggested that while her customers have dictated the assortment she carries be mostly Canadian, it is due to the aesthetics of the clothes and exclusivity of limited production runs which made the domestically-produced garments more desirable, not necessarily that the designers were Canadian. But in recent years, since the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010, a pride has been exhibited toward Canadian-centric clothing. Both Roots and the Bay were recognized internationally for their Canadian-inspired garb made specifically for the Olympics. The Bay re-launched their four-colour heritage line, including a redesign of the blanket-coat in collaboration with Toronto-based brand Smythe. The heritage line has become a staple nationwide in Bay department stores.

Many of the respondents described Canada as a cohesion of American, European and Asian influence. One respondent noted that Vancouver is quickly becoming a conspicuous consumer's paradise because of the influence of Asian brand-culture that is being introduced. Alongside the nouveau-riche approach to consumption is the city's growing demographic: the conscious-consumer, who is more discerning than their more-is-more counterparts, consuming instead products that are derivative of sustainable practices and materials. Despite Vancouver's consumer culture dichotomy being highly representative of the fashion industry and its trends right now, this city's influence was dismissed by several respondents, some of whom cited Vancouver being "too new", "too West Coast", or "too disconnected from Toronto and Montréal" to register any valid impact on fashion culture beyond its regional borders. This sentiment embodies the core issues of fragmentation in Canada through the "othering" of regions. Further, the hierarchy of international fashion capitals is mirrored in the hierarchy of fashion cities in Canada, specifically, the validity of a city's position as a fashion leader, hinged on the mythmaking of its historically-based legitimacy as a centre of style-makers and a fashion-focused culture. Therefore, though Vancouver is developing a strong fashion culture, its validity is threatened due to its relatively short history of fashion relative to Montréal and Toronto.

The two "hubs" of Canadian fashion were described as fairly disconnected by most of the respondents. In Toronto, a very conservative aesthetic is described by most of the respondents, and may be attributed to Toronto's position as the financial capital of Canada. Toronto was further described as a city greatly influenced by American media, lifestyle, and celebrity. As the hub for most of Canada's media outlets, Toronto's influence by American culture may distort the Canadian's perception of a national aesthetic and values. Montréal, meanwhile, was described as the most innovative centre of fashion in Canada, with a design culture older than any other in Canada.

Montréal's protection of their culture has strengthened their ties to European taste and lifestyle. Québec is to some degree the most insular culture in Canada due to the language preservation laws. These laws have created an entire media industry separate from English Canada, from television to publishing to advertising.

Interview responses helped form a landscape of Canadian culture and fashion shaped by international influences. The responses prompted the question: how can a bridge be made between the fashion centres in Canada in order to create a unified image of Canadian fashion which will in turn engage Canadians and drive the fashion industry? Many of the respondents could not readily identify a strategy or solution. The retail-chain owner identified their position in Ottawa as a bridge between regional perceptions of cultural disparity across Canada. Ottawa's fashion, like that of Vancouver, is influenced by the geographic landscape and athletic culture that has resulted in sportswear and alternative styles indicative of ski/skate/snowboard-subcultures. Additionally, Ottawa's unique position, both geographically and linguistically, between European-influenced Québec and American-influenced Toronto, has resulted in an atmosphere of neutrality in regard to regionalism and cultural expropriation. Ottawa's fashion culture is representative of all Montréal's, Toronto's, and Vancouver's fashion cultures as described by the respondents over the course of all the interviews. But Ottawa's inclusive fashion culture is very unique and dependent on multiple factors, particularly its geographical location and landscape; a similar model of neutrality isn't easily appropriated across all Canadian regions. But Ottawa is a model that exhibits the cohesion of perceived "distinct" cultures coexisting within a single urban space, proving a unified Canadian aesthetic removed from the constraints of physical space is achievable. This respondent asserted that an important tool in dissolving regional borders in order to promote designers as Canadian is building stronger networks of communication between regions. Blogs and comment boards are one of the ways this respondent remains informed about fashion across Canada in order to deliver an assortment of Canadian-made clothing to consumers.

The Ottawa consumer may be more responsive to Canadian designers as a whole and therefore it should not be assumed that the Ottawa-retailer's approach can easily be mimicked by all Canadian retailers. In fact, many of the respondents who work closely to the retail division of their companies noted that the immediate region in which they were selling defined their marketing practices and product assortment. One respondent who represented a very successful Canadian designer noted that his identity was strongly based on being French-Canadian, with his "Frenchness" being the operative marketing strategy. It is this region-based identity that perpetuates the division between fashion centres across Canada. Since regions don't share experiences, one approach is to consider the Canadian heritage as the link between all regions. Drawing on our shared history will enable Canadians to understand which experiences are shared across the nation.

Another respondent noted that it is not the design-origin of the pieces that matter most; rather it is the artisanal quality and aesthetics of the clothes that resonated with their consumers. This retail space has become the branding and marketing engine for the various Canadian and international brands that are limited in availability due to small production runs. The interior of the retail space becomes important in creating the experience for the consumer to develop emotions about the pieces they are buying. Several respondents noted that their consumer identifies with their brand image and the clothes are an extension of that. It should be considered then, that global fashion, as many respondents claimed is what the Canadian consumer wants, is very much a part of the Canadian culture and style, but what differentiates these homogenized styles is the branding around the retailer and designer that is distinctly Canadian. It is in the shopping experience that the consumer attributes emotional ties to the clothing and connects their self-image with the brand image.

4.4   Influencers of Taste: Fashion Shows and Magazines

Fashion is communicated to consumers through media, including publications, television, and online reports via blogs or zines. In today's global economy, media is a critical component of the communication and dissemination of fashion trends. The Canadian consumer's desire to have immediate access to information is evident in the success of shows like *Fashion Television* and magazines like *Flare* and *Fashion*. These media outlets perform as taste-makers, forecasting what the consumer will trend toward in their sartorial selections of a given season or year.

Fashion shows in Canada are regional events and often occur after the buying season. These shows, as described by one participant, are media events intended to gain press coverage. Some respondents suggested that fashion shows in Canada are effective in what they do: promote. The role of Canadian fashion shows is not to compete against Paris, New York, or Milan, and several respondents expressed that no Canadian city, for various reasons, will ever attain global attention like the "Big 3". Despite this, many respondents felt that designers should continue to show at a fashion week in order to build their presence locally.

A good fashion show can attract the right kind of attention, and being favoured by highly successful magazines, like *Fashion*, has national reach. Canadian magazines have done an important job in differentiating themselves from their American counterparts. For instance, *Elle Canada* is using the American legacy of the *Elle* brand to market Canadian content to its readers. Canadian magazines are actively promoting Canadian designers more than non-Canadian magazines, which is why, as one respondent noted, Canadian publishing is so important within Canada's fashion industry. But featuring Canadian content and designers isn't necessarily an easy sell to the Canadian reader. When asked if their reader cares whether something is Canadian, a respondent in publishing said that

Canadian designs have to be placed alongside established international brands in order to give credibility to the domestic labels. The "Canadian" message, she said, needs to be subtle. An approach one magazine has taken is to feature Canadian designers in editorial spreads, validating in the mind of the reader that the designer, through association with and approval by the magazine, is someone to whom attention should be paid and from whom one should buy.

4.5   Perceptions of Favouritism: Driving Regions Further Apart

Though no formal questions directly addressed the role the provincial or federal governments play within the Canadian fashion industry, many respondents were inclined to discuss issues related to government funding. Several respondents from Toronto cited the governments' lack of financial support as the biggest contributor to increased offshore production and high clothing imports. Though this project and its research does not directly address issues related to government funding, the relevance of this issue for many of the respondents prompted the analysis of these comments in the context of mythmaking and the "othering" of regions, which exacerbates the issues this paper does directly deal with: regionalism and fragmentation.

Government support in the fashion industry was discussed by many respondents as one of the most critical barriers in developing Canada as a fashion leader. Several respondents cited the government as a proponent in the divide of Canadian fashion into regions through unfair subsidies to favoured regions, while ignoring others. What became evident during the course of the interviews was the perception that particular regions were being favoured by the government through special programs and funding. Many respondents asserted that the success of Montréal's fashion industry and culture hinged on continued government funding, while these same respondents maintained that Toronto has achieved its success through hard work and smart business acumen. Many of the Ontario respondents – two of whom worked in areas of the fashion industry in Toronto that relied heavily, if not completely, on government funding – asserted that Québec was financially favoured by both the provincial and federal governments. Québec respondents expressed disbelief in this assertion, stating that Toronto received the most funding from various levels of government; one respondent even claimed that Toronto has been the government darling when it comes to special funding and economic boosts. The respondent who originated from Edmonton but is now stationed in Toronto claimed no city west of Ontario receives funding for fashion that is "worthwhile".

This debate that centres on "Montréal versus Toronto versus the rest of Canada" was confirmed through the petulant attitude exhibited by each "side". It is this accusatory attitude taken up by so many of the respondents that suggests regional disparities exist in the Canadian fashion industry

through the mythmaking of "others", rooted in collective feelings of regional inequality and threats of cultural homogenization.

Respondents were asked to elaborate on how the fashion industry would benefit from increased government funding. Offering examples like New York Fashion Week, some respondents claimed fashion is a form of entertainment and cultural growth, fostering talent and attracting tourists. Like other cultural industries in Canada, fashion should be subsidized as a cultural sector which in turn will contribute to the industry's and economic growth. The majority of respondents claimed the government has yet to recognize fashion as a sustainable industry for economic growth.

One respondent noted the success of New York Fashion Week as the model upon which Toronto Fashion Week operates and is key in driving the commercial and tourist aspects of fashion. Despite the superficiality often associated with large fashion events, fashion weeks are viable marketing tools produced to drive fashion business with many respondents noting that fashion weeks are business-driven events. Unlike those in New York or Paris, Canadian fashion weeks are very regional and therefore not nationally or internationally recognized. The regional centricity of fashion weeks in Canada does not discount their importance; rather it affirms the value of these marketing tools in reminding local consumers of the domestic products accessible to them. Fashion weeks also contribute to the content of Canadian media and Canadian-centric fashion magazines. The potential of these regional fashion shows in developing a wider picture of Canadian fashion will be explored further in the creative portion of this project.

The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain the core issues affecting Canadian fashion so as to develop viable strategies to build business. Government funding is important in any economic sector, especially after the most recent recession. The interviews revealed the obvious misperception regions have toward each other, specifically when a particular region finds great success. Rather than considering the methods and means by which a region developed a strong fashion industry or culture, it is immediately dismissed as being favoured with government funding. The perpetuation of myths surrounding "favoured" regions strengthens the perception of regional autonomy and broadens the cultural disparities that have fragmented Canadian fashion. In order for Canada to promote its own talent, the successes of various regions need to be celebrated rather than questioned or dismissed. Canadian talent must be embraced as a national treasure and not a regional export. It is the intention of BoutiqueNation.ca to promote all regions in Canada and create an online community representative of the Canadian fashion culture. Through the development of this website, it is my intention to show that it is not a lack or disparity in government funding that has hindered the growth of the national fashion industry, but the lack of community that transcends regional borders ready to support Canadian fashion.

4.6   Fashion Capitals: Why We Should Care About Vancouver

Regions have a tendency to be so insulated that the success of other regions is either questioned or dismissed. Vancouver is a model other Canadian cities should look to for innovative marketing and branding ideas to which Canadian and American consumers have responded. Vancouver was used in the interviews as representative of a rapidly developing fashion centre on Canada's west coast. Often the inclusion of Vancouver as a fashion centre was quickly dismissed, with one respondent citing that the history of their fashion culture being too short to be credible alongside Toronto and Montréal. The ready dismissal of the quick rise of prominent brands like lululemon and Aritzia that originate in Vancouver discounts their effective marketing and promotion across Canada. Both companies experienced fast expansion, and both are distinctly Canadian in their business structure and head office locations, but they produce very global fashion. What these brands have in common are the distinct cultures they promoted via the online and in-store retail experiences. Both brands have offered global fashion, but have differentiated themselves through their cultures and brand imagery.

Many of the respondents, when asked what the Canadian aesthetic is, answered that there isn't one, while some mentioned that it is a blend of American conservative commercial and European flare and quality. These two Vancouver brands have managed to move beyond perceptions of regional diversity and have penetrated numerous demographics across Canada, suggesting there may be an aesthetic most Canadians share. Branding has been the most important aspect in launching these companies, specifically branding a culture through consistency across all regions. Unlike the brand variance of stand-alone boutiques and the association a designer forms with these boutiques, these two companies deliver a consistent experience to the consumer, who buys into the brand's culture. Their brand image and store concept is very clear, and the global or homogenous fashion styles being sold by these retailers have been so successful because of the in-store experience that has been created. One respondent who markets shopping centres in Ontario said that creating an in-store experience for the Ontario consumer is incredibly important in order to compete with e-commerce options. She asserted that the in-store experience has become an important consideration in determining where the consumer shops and how they associate product value with the brand's culture. The success of these Canadian brands through the development of brand cultures affirms the need for consumers to identify within a community of like-minded people. The isolation of regions is dissolved through perceptions of shared experiences and contributes to the creation of one culture. It is this experience towards which consumers are gravitating that will help define the Canadian fashion culture through an online platform.

4.7   The Internet and the Modern Consumer

The interviews concluded with questions concerning the internet and its role in developing fashion communities and communicating beyond time-space constraints associated with traditional marketing and selling techniques. All respondents stressed the importance of the internet in today's market and culture. More than ever, social media has become the platform on which people interact regularly with one another. One designer claimed that if you don't have a presence on Facebook, you aren't running a successful business. Supporting this claim, the 2011 AHRC report stated that 57% of all major retailers maintain facebook.com accounts (72) and 67% of mid to large retailers in Canada use some form of social media platform (71). Consumers are now able to connect with one another and discuss what they like, share stories, and offer advice and recommendations.

E-commerce was cited by several respondents as not being an important aspect of the online experience. In fact, many respondents said the tangible in-store experience will never be replaced by its online counterpart. Instead, many respondents said the internet merely extends the real experience for the consumer. Participating in online communities, whether passively or actively, allows the consumer to develop a relationship with the brand, thus developing and nurturing brand loyalty.

Several participants said the internet can take business a step further by offering consumers profiles of what they will like by trending their previous views or selections. This feature not only personalizes the experience for the user/consumer, it also markets without overtly promoting or advertising. Because of the subtlety of a trending feature, the consumer considers the trending selections a natural progression of their taste and their subsequent selections of trending items as authentic, rather than controlled for the purpose of selling merchandise. Perceived control is an important component in marketing to the fashion consumer, especially online. Like trending, blogs are an important promotion technique that subtly directs consumers to a product. Blogs offer insight into fashion trends and advice on how to wear outfits, while offering conversational-writing that engages the reader. Holt Renfrew recognized the importance of blogs, specifically street style blogs, and has developed a component of their website which offers street style shots with information on where you can buy similar pieces at Holt Renfrew. This indirect method allows for the reader to consider the brand to be accessible but still desirable. Blogs also create a feeling of accessibility between the product and the consumer through the tone of the blogger. One respondent cited style.com as an excellent source for up to date information because of the way in which it is communicated and up-to-the-minute. Blogs can be effective in developing markets through readership attracted to the tone, immediacy, and content of the site.

Online magazines have incorporated the blogging style into their online content. One editor of a national publication said that the content from print magazines does not translate online for the reader; instead, shorter articles and interactive features resonate. Further, the online magazine is a destination

for immediate and changing content, while the published counterpart remains experiential for the reader, through its tangible qualities and typical month-long lag-times between publications. Therefore the online and print versions derive from the same magazine, one editor expressed that the reader of the print magazine does not necessarily become into an online reader, or vice versa. This split in reader profiles results in similar content being delivered in differing tones and presentations to engage both demographics.

The psychology of the online reader, describes one editor, is someone who demands immediate information and new content often. For the editors, this means fast turnarounds for content, images, and interactive features. The positive side of online magazines over their print counterparts is the community it can build. Message boards, Facebook links, and Twitter feeds have opened national magazines up to a large community of readers eager to participate in a fashion community and dialogue.

It is the reader who prefers the online to the print magazine that one editor identified as evidence of the importance of the internet in marketing and promoting fashion. Information has become so immediate and convenient via internet access on cell phones and laptops that traditional methods for advertisements via print ads or commercials can be almost entirely avoided with online apps and videos. It is therefore critical to the success of Canadian designers and fashion companies to develop a strong online presence. But as one respondent noted, many designers in Canada do not have large teams working for them; their resources are limited in time, finances, and internet savvy – developing a website that will communicate their brand effectively just isn't possible. This observation is an important step in understanding the limitations Canadians have in marketing themselves across Canada.

The internet has potential to bridge all the regions in Canada and develop a unified vision of Canadian fashion. It is crucial that a strategy be developed for the online promotion of these designers, and ultimately Canadian fashion in general, in order to entice potential consumers who currently choose non-Canadian brands.

4.8   A Proposal for the Integration of Regionalized Fashion Cultures

The proposal for integration among Canadian regions to better promote Canadian design via the internet is intended as a starting point in developing effective communication, marketing, and public relations strategies that will advance the current state of Canadian fashion as a viable industry both domestically and globally. The development of BoutiqueNation.ca is intended to reflect the current needs of Canadian consumers and effective online marketing approaches that have been utilized by

Canadian professionals as expressed by the 22 respondents who were interviewed for this project. The results of the interviews indicated several trends: fashion is currently global, and therefore must appeal to consumers beyond the Canadian border, regardless of whether the market is limited to Canada; online marketing is becoming the most important area for business growth in most demographics, with several respondents noting Twitter is effective in reaching the baby-boomer generation, and one noting that Facebook is most effective in developing word-of-mouth promotion; and the most important information when searching for fashion online is the designer, his or her collection, and where it is sold. All the respondents noted that design continues to be the most important feature of clothing, regardless of price or manufacturing practices, including as fair labour or organic fibre; this is not to suggest that those features do not resonate with various consumers, rather, that aesthetics remains constant, with all other factors variable.

The design of BoutiqueNation.ca is intended to unify Canadian fashion that has resulted from regionalism. Initially, the prototype would not include the cities or regions from which designers originate or produce their collections. This was intended to eliminate preconceived perceptions of region-specific styles that consumers across Canada might have, resulting in the site-users' selection of clothes to be based on their personal aesthetic preferences and self-image. This idea was explained to several respondents in order to receive feedback across different professional roles in the fashion industry. A respondent described their experience marketing a Canadian product domestically versus internationally: she noted that Canadian consumers responded to the product's functionality and design – little regard was paid for the product's regional origin in Canada, and often went unknown. She compared that to marketing the same product internationally, a campaign that relied heavily on the product being distinctly Canadian, and a characteristic that resonated with the consumer and drove sales. She suggested that the perception the international consumer has of Canada as superior in dealing with specific weather conditions led to the association that Canadian products for those weather conditions must therefore be high in quality and functionality. She asserted that is was the appropriation of those misconceptions that worked in the brand's favour internationally, but domestically, Canadians didn't respond to their own myths. In fact, this particular respondent said marketing a distinctly Canadian product to Canadians is difficult, and has resulted in regional marketing campaigns, rather than a national one. Other respondents noted the same trend, moving toward a focused marketing approach based on regional feedback and responses to products, rather than generic marketing methods that target Canadians as a single demographic.

From the marketing experiences of these respondents and the movement toward more focused marketing campaigns, it appears that including regions in the website design is critical in order to first create a sense of familiarity for the Canadian user through their own regionalized experiences, and to

then encourage those users to inform themselves about other regions by presenting them alongside their own.

4.9   Domain Name and Site Appearance

BoutiqueNation.ca was designed to reflect Canada and connote style. After speaking with several respondents regarding their branding approaches for both Canadian and international markets, it became necessary to approach the design of the website as a brand able to resonate with the global user, but still be representative of Canada. Minimal colour and few graphics were used in order to appeal to an international user, though a Canadian-flag-red appears consistently throughout the website, branding the content as Canadian.

The background image was selected based on its "glitter" appearance, often associated with glamour and fashion. The red of the sparkles closely matches the red of the Canadian flag, which connotes national identity for many Canadians, regardless of region. The red of this image is the only colour used in the logo and text throughout the site. Taking a less-is-more approach, black, white and grey were selected specifically to perform as canvases for the content of the site and not distract from the promotion of individual designers and Canadian fashion. The site logo uses two fonts to emphasize the contrasting definitions and duality of the nouns used in the site name. A soft and refined font was selected for "boutique", set to contrast a bold and rigid font for "nation". Both words are bilingual, and a French version of the domain, NationBoutique.ca, would also be used to market in French communities.

Boutique denotes small in scale, specialized in assortment, and exclusive to specific clientele; nation, as defined by oxforddictionaries.com literally means a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory. The contrast of exclusivity and unity in the site name iterates the current atmosphere of Canadian fashion as a small industry predicated on insular regional cultures reinforced through geographic dispersion of urban centres. The function of the site is represented by the word "nation" in the title: intended to unite a fragmented fashion industry in order to promote national design and aesthetics and develop the fashion industry within Canada.

4.10   Site Design, Accessibility, and Navigation

The purpose of the site is to make Canadian fashion accessible to Canadians; therefore, the site is fully accessible by the public. Rather than the generic, or American, ".com", the site uses a ".ca" in

the domain name. The intention is for the site to be a destination for international users as well as Canadians, so it is important in the promotion of Canadian designs to indicate the origins of the site.

The site is offered in both French and English, as Canada is officially a bilingual nation, and content will appear in the user's preferred language depending on their existing internet settings. All content pages will have a language toggle button in the top right-hand corner, making the site language-accessible to all Canadians. The exception to bilingual content is for trademarked, business, or individuals' names, which can be unilingual. For instance, all French accents in names will be used in both French and English content to maintain consistency in the brands and individuals being promoted on the site.

The site navigation is simple, and the tabs for the homepage and regional navigation are repeated on all pages sitewide. The regional tabs offer selections via drop down menus which appear when the user rolls over the tab. Options are highlighted in red when the mouse rolls over them, and remain highlighted when selected. The user's path (called breadcrumbs) remains listed under the regional navigation to allow for quick return options. All images on the site open with one click in what is called a "lightbox", floating on top of and shading out the current page. The user can browse to other pictures on the same page using arrow keys, or exit the lightbox and return to the content page. All external links open in new tabs in the same browser window; this feature was developed after a respondent noted that if a user leaves the website for an external link, they likely will not return. By opening links in new tabs, the browser keeps BoutiqueNation.ca open while allowing a user to visit external sites. Navigation was made simple in order to increase usability for all internet users, including those with limited online experience.

Homepage

The homepage is intended to summarize the content of the site for the user in key categories such as "newsbites", "hot list", "trending", "blog", and "twitter/facebook". The selection of these specific categories, which are featured in various areas of the site in varying degrees, is to appeal to a multitude of tastes or experiences towards which the unique user will best respond and which will subsequently increase the likelihood of them remaining on the site.

Key Categories

Newsbites: a live feed of current news items in the fashion industry. These news items include fashion relevant/related events, quotes, launches, collaborations, etc. The purpose of this news reel is to

inform users of current industry news. A strong focus on Canadian content will be made, though in keeping with the inclusivity of the site, international news will be delivered as well – perhaps focusing on Canadian designers appearing internationally, Canadian design being featured or sold or promoted elsewhere, etc.

Hot List: this is a rotating section of top stories, trends, events, user profiles, etc. throughout the site. This list is compiled through user view frequencies, responses, and reposts to the site's blogs, trends, and news.

Twitter/Facebook: this area functions as a real-time feed of users' social media comments, tweets and "likes" while on the site. The purpose of this is to develop the sense of community and encourage users to join the site as a member in order to participate socially with other site members. Social media would be heavily relied upon to encourage user sharing of site content. Social media is a free medium and can often be the most trusted source for individuals seeking honest opinions of products, services, and other offerings.

Blog: this portion of the site was developed after many respondents cited blogs as their primary source for fashion news and discovering designers and retailers. The function of the blog is the same as newsbites, though it is packaged with opinions, advice or as a commentary. Both news and blogs are included in order to appeal to a wide demographic of users.

Trending: this area is central to the interactivity of the site. The trending works in two ways. The first is the trending of current fashion that appears on international and Canadian runways, with specific trends forecasted by top editors. This trending is important in promoting Canadian fashion, as one respondent said that consumers will be more apt to like and buy Canadian fashion if it is delivered alongside recognizable international brands, a technique this respondent often uses in fashion features. The second function of trending is to compile the trends determined by users. This encourages the development of the community by reflecting the tastes and preferences of the users. It also reflects more accurate trending forecasts as the users represent the consumer market for fashion.

The user trending portion of the site develops from a need to unite all users across Canada and discover what the Canadian aesthetic is in order to better support it. As the development of the prototype moved forward along with the interviews, it became evident that a singular aesthetic will not define the Canadian fashion landscape, rather, exposing our shared experiences will. The trending featuring exposes these similarities and presents them within an online community setting.

Community

The concept of community for the website came from interviewing fashion professionals who answered questions related to ideas of fashion communities and their experiences with them. Many of the respondents had different ideas of what made a fashion community, with some citing the industry itself as the community. Others described the community as a creative collective within their city that supports designers through networking, social engagements, business development, and creative inspiration. The remaining respondents either did not recognize whether a fashion community exists and if they belong, or completely rejected their inclusion in a community, citing that communities can obstruct the individual's vision for their business. The responses suggested that "community" draws strong ideas of unity, interaction, and similarities from the respondents, as those who could not identify a community in their urban centre or in Canada posited that, at least within their role, fashion is a business, not a community. The assertion that fashion is a business and not a community connotes a negative observation and denies the very structure of the fashion industry that depends on the interrelationships between the stages of fashion production and consumption. Despite nearly half of the respondents' uncertainty of or refusal to belong to a design community, the success of fashion is dependent on meaningful symbols and context that is interpreted and adopted by individuals who together, through collective acceptance and performance of specific symbolic and contextual adornment, form a fashion collective. It is the development of these collectives or communities through which fashion exercises meaning. The purpose of the site is to overcome current geographical restraints on the formation of a Canadian community through the development of a virtual one.

The Community portion of the site is composed of the individual user profile, and all user profiles. It performs similarly to most forums, as its key focus is developing a user's online persona of the user and offering several ways for users to interact with one another. The primary function of the user profile from an industry standpoint is the collection of unbiased data across Canadian regions based on consumer trends. User trends can be filtered by region, offering an overview of how users across Canada respond to fashion. The data is collected from users "linking" fashion stills or designer pages, leaving comments, using hashtags, reposting to individual profiles or external sites, and the frequency in which unique visitors view pages. Collecting this data will be important for the fashion industry to better market to the Canadian consumer and recognize where key demographics for specific styles are located.

The current culture of online memes, Twitter hash tags, and Facebook reposts signal that online users want to belong to collectives, identifying themselves with "like-minded" people through social networks. Incorporating Twitter and Facebook features to the site will enable users to connect to and using their current social network accounts to BoutiqueNation.ca, and serve to further promote the website through external sites.

The homepage of the Community section lists website trends: Loved Looks, Visionaries, and Trending Report. Loved Looks trends user responses to looks from collections and runways. Users participate in this trending by "liking" particular looks. The Visionaries feature is a collection of user profiles that have developed "liked" portfolios most frequently viewed by other users. User portfolios are developed through liking looks on the site. The portfolios can be curated and presented on user profiles with website-offered portfolio templates. This feature is intended to improve the interaction of users and individualize their experiences. The Trending Report filters runway looks through aesthetic features of the clothes as forecasted by top fashion editors. For example, "leather" will trend all looks on the website from the selected season that included leather.

Runway

Canada has numerous fashion weeks that happen throughout the year. These fashion weeks are usually representative of the regions in which they are based. The number of regional fashion shows in Canada reflects the value fashion has in various regions, as well as the need to represent designers outside Montréal and Toronto. Because many fashion shows are restricted to their regions in Canada, knowledge of designers who show exclusively at these events rarely extends beyond the local city limits. Without national press coverage, many shows are produced with relatively little awareness outside their urban centres or regions. The purpose of including all major Canadian fashion shows is to equally promote the designers who show during smaller-scale fashion weeks. The legitimacy of a designer shouldn't hinge on the location in which they show their collection, but as noted earlier, fashion hierarchies exist, and it is therefore important to include the lesser known shows alongside prominent ones in order to better promote all the designers.

The Runway section of the site includes all the collections shown during fashion weeks by Canadian designers. The inclusion of international shows was based on the success of Canadian designers outside Canada who show at international fashion weeks. These shows were included as a way to promote Canadian designers abroad. Through the course of the interviews, the subject of losing Canadian talent to European and American runways was addressed. One respondent in particular addressed the issue well, asserting that the location of the designer doesn't validate their talent or national origins. This respondent suggested that the designers who have success abroad are in fact promoting Canadian fashion as their national origins are never hidden; the success of any Canadian designer, whether in Canada, or abroad, can only be a good thing. It is therefore important to include Canadian designers who show their collections outside of Canada.

Designers

This section functions as an in-depth look at designer profiles, offering news, collections, retail locations, and information central to their business. The Runway and Collection tabs bring users to stills of seasonal collections, with drop down tabs listing specific seasons to view. The ability for users to "like" an image is possible when it opens in a lightbox; "like", "tweet" and other share options are available. This feature can only be accessed by correlating social media account holders (i.e. to tweet, one must have a Twitter account). Non-users would be redirected to the sign-up/log-in page on that medium if they select these icons.

The "Buzz" tab filters all relevant news stories and blogs from the website related to the selected designer and presents it to the user. This allows for users to learn about particular designers beyond their "About" page, which merely offers generic information about the designer. The Shop tab was included to help users buy the clothes they like. Rather than presenting Canadian fashion as only accessible via the internet, it was important to ensure users could find designers in retail stores across Canada. This section lists up-to-date retailers selling items from the designer.

In the Loop

Many of the homepage elements are taken from this section. In the Loop provides users with fashion-related news, blogs, and society pages. This section is filtered by "national" and "urban" to assist users in accessing information relevant at a national level or specific to regions. This filtering was included to personalize the experience for each user, as well as to better research news outside their regions.

Blog: articles are written daily on various topics including trends, events, advice, etc. the blog portion is intended to approach fashion from a cultural standpoint. Within this section, links to external Canadian fashion blogs are listed. This was included to strengthen communication across Canada, and supporting Canadian fashion bloggers will improve their exposure across Canada.

Society: this page was included to counter the perception that Canada has no celebrity or aristocratic culture, features that define our American and European counterparts. Celebrity endorsement of designers and trends has always promoted fashion. Creating fashion icons in Canada may prove to be an important component in validating Canada's position as a fashion leader in the mind of Canadian consumers.

International: this portion of the section is intended to give users an international summary of relevant fashion news and trends. Because fashion is a global economy, it is important to be informed about

global trends that will impact the Canadian consumer. Additionally, Canadians are greatly influenced by international cultures; if international news were not included in this Canadian site, the purpose of dissolving regional borders in order to build a strong national fashion industry would be lost due to the development of an insular nation in a global industry.

Your City

Similar to the homepage, this section allows users to select from a list of Canadian cities. The selection of Toronto, for example, will filter the site into a Toronto-centric site and each tab will focus on Toronto. This tab was created in order to make the navigation of the site easier if the user is focused on one region, perhaps for shopping outings, contacting a local designer, etc. This feature is useful for users to learn about regions outside their own, though, too. For example, a Toronto user can select Vancouver as their city. This will filter the website's content to be Vancouver-centric, allowing for the Toronto user to learn about Vancouver-based designers, retailers who sell Canadian clothes, or news related to that city's fashion community.

Chapter Five

<u>5.1　　Conclusion</u>

The development of fashion capitals occurs through concerted efforts by the members belonging to a culture that embraces fashion and protects domestic design and manufacturing. Canada's position in the international fashion capital hierarchy is non-existent. Value is found in understanding how Paris, Milan, London, and New York came to be influential in the direction of trends on a global level based on forecasts by tastemakers who reside in these fashion centres. The similarities these capitals share in their success is not a singular, nation-based aesthetic vision nor is it a natural pool of talent unfound in other areas of the world; instead their success derives from a society that supports fashion as a relevant culture, industry, entertainment, and economic source. Looking at these contributing factors, a strategy for Canada as a fashion nation must be developed that will promote Canadian culture and create economic growth. A unified vision of Canada should be established in order to market Canadian designers nationally and globally. That vision can been attained via the internet, removing the current restrictions regionalism has placed on our understanding of the Canadian experience, and the exclusivity in those experiences as defined by our geographic location across a massive land.

Issues in the Canadian fashion industry may still persist despite the proposed strategy of an online fashion culture. This is partially due to the current issues concerning government funding – a debate that was evident in the interviews conducted for this project and which contributes to the fragmentation of regional cultures through perceptions of federal government favouritism regarding allotment of funding, as well as the differences between provincial and local funding toward the fashion industry. Another issue that may persist in spite of the online proposal for a national fashion community is the issue of geographic space. The intention of this proposal is to overcome the perceived differences between regionalized cultures across Canada in order to achieve a clearer sense of Canadian fashion. But what the proposal does not suggest is methods for distributing fashion across Canada beyond the internet. User exposure to designers in various regions will help promote fashion beyond the site, but research has not been done to determine whether a demand in terms of positive user responses to designers will translate into new markets across Canada for those designers. Issues of logistics, retailers, and differences in regional price points have not been considered within the scope of this project, and therefore should be evaluated alongside future development of this prototype or strategy similar.

Further research concerning government funding should be done in Canada, as well as in other countries, in order to properly assess its role in the success of fashion industries. During early stages of research, it was noted that many countries have developed fashion ministries specifically for the promotion and development of that industry; this is something that has not been done on a national

scale in Canada, and research should be compiled that considers the effectiveness of fashion ministries toward the success and growth of a nation's fashion exports. If a ministry of fashion were to be formed in Canada, the prototype developed for this project would be useful in compiling relevant and contemporary data on Canadians in order to better inform the objective and mandate of said ministry.

The aim for this project was to begin a dialogue concerning the role community has in developing fashion cultures and, subsequently, industry. Fashion derives its meanings and symbols through context, therefore in a country as regionally divided by geographic space as Canada, the context of fashion appears local. This project suggests that through the development of an online community, exposure of local fashions across all regions will reveal more commonalities than disparities among the fashions worn by Canadians. These commonalities are the basis for community forming, which can potentially dissolve issues related to cultural-othering of regions. An online platform that enables the commonalities of Canadians regarding fashion to be brought to light and embraced will begin to correct the misconceptions of regional disparities that have fragmented Canada's ability to market fashion through identifiable Canadian characteristics, ideals, and modes. The online community shares many of the same attributes as the physical community and makes it a suitable alternative in defining a Canadian fashion culture, rather than promoting a singular urban centre as a fashion capital representative of Canada.

This project should also be understood as the beginning of a dialogue about current issues in Canadian fashion and how the internet can be a platform for idea exchange and communication on larger scale. Research concerning the development of an online community aimed at dissolving region-based identities in order to achieve a nation-focused culture of fashion should be done in order to validate or discount the proposal for an online alternative to traditional fashion capitals made in this paper. Due to various constraints, the depth of research attained through primary interviews is relatively minimal and was intended as a contemporary review of the current issues affecting a small sampling of fashion professionals in Canada. In order to attain a clearer picture of Canada's position within the fashion industry on a national and global level, research that includes quantifiable data measuring perceptions Canadians have of domestic production and designed clothing should be done, as a well as extending the respondent sample to international fashion professionals. By extending this sampling, the perception of Canadian fashion from an international perspective will be revealed and potentially assist in the construction of a fashion identity and culture. Before the international consumer can consider Canada as a place of important fashion production, design, and culture, the Canadian industry needs to be validated first by Canadian consumers through domestic promotion and consumption of our own fashion.

Appendix

The purpose of this prototype is to explore new platforms for communication and community forming in the Canadian fashion industry, specifically among consumers, where the current fashion community is fragmented by regionalized cultures. Through the formation of one community representative of all Canadian regions and consumers, a website provides a cohesive culture of fashion that is definitive of a nation-based style. The fashion capitals of England, France, Italy, and the U.S.A. serve as urban spaces representative of the national aesthetic, characteristic, and sartorial preferences of its citizens. The myths associated with the nation's values, heritage, craftsmanship, and influence are reinforced through the styles worn by the natives in situ.

The following pages offer a proposal for a website that has been designed to encourage the growth of an online community representative of Canadians and their fashion preferences. The formation of this nationwide community may result in Canadian designers finding greater exposure beyond their immediate selling-regions, thus increasing the opportunity for Canadian designers to expand their consumer reach. By emphasizing the commonalities shared among the website's users, the potential for a distinct national aesthetic may become more evident, resulting in greater opportunity for Canadian designers to be considered worthwhile in the eyes of the consumer.

The prototype includes a sitemap and a series of images that represent the online experience for a user. The appearance of the website was developed through feedback from several interview respondents, comparative analysis of Canadian blogs and fashion websites, and through a review of flagship stores of designers identified clearly with a national aesthetic (Abramson and Stuchin). In addition to the visual component, the content, language, interactive features, and navigation were developed through research concerning online communities, consumer psychology and sociology. The minimal colour pallet of white, black, and red were selected to reflect a blank canvas, with reference to the website's Canadian origin. This was done specifically to encourage the user to form their own impressions and preferences about the content and images. By creating a clean and non-obstructive web design, the "environment" of the community is developed through the users' interaction with social media and each other. The emphasis is placed on the relationships that are formed over a singular user experience.

Image 1
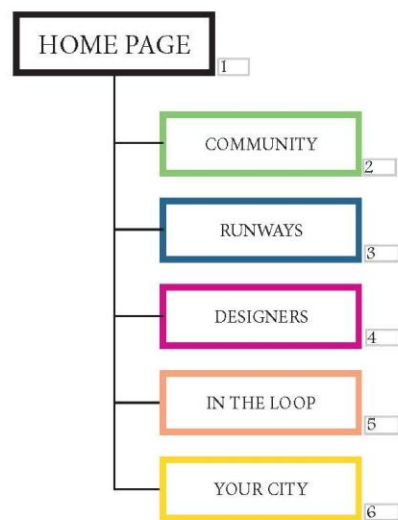
1	Homepage features newsbites and trending reports
2	User community including user profile and interactive features
3	List of Canadian Fashion Weeks and includes Canadians showing abroad
4	Profiles of Canadian designers
5	News, blogs, twitter/facebook feeds, etc. Homepage features newsbites
6	Filters entire site to center on one selected city, ex. Toronto-centric

<u>Image 1</u>

This top-level site map shows how the site is divided into five main sections: "Community", "Runway", "Designers", "In the Loop", and "Your City"

Image 2

HOME PAGE

COMMUNITY

2.1 USER

2.2 CREATE PROFILE

2.3 SIGN IN

2.4 MY VIEW

2.5 PANORAMA

2.6 FILTER REGIONS

2.7 VISIONARIES

2.8 ON THE STREETS

2.9 "LOVED" LOOKS

2.10 TRENDING

2.11 USER TRENDS

2.12 EDITOR'S TRENDS

2.13 USER COMMENTS

2.14 RUNWAY

2.15 DESIGNERS

2.1 User log-in and sign-up page
2.2 Prompts user to complete profile in order to gain access to site as member
2.3 General sign-in
2.4 User page features portfolio of their "loved", comments, and trends
2.5 Interactive database and social network for all community users
2.6 Filter users by region; industry tool for data mining
2.7 Highlights profiles of users with "loved" portfolios best rated by other users
2.8 Street style trending across Canada compiled by BoutiqueNation.ca
2.9 Trend of user "loved" looks which rate highest on site
2.10 Filter trends
2.11 Industry forecasted trends and corresponding site images
2.12 Filter's user "loved" looks and connect users who tagged same images
2.13 User comments on images, trends, and general site news
2.14 Users can select runway listed with images and go to runway collection
2.15 Users can select designers listed with images and go to designer profile
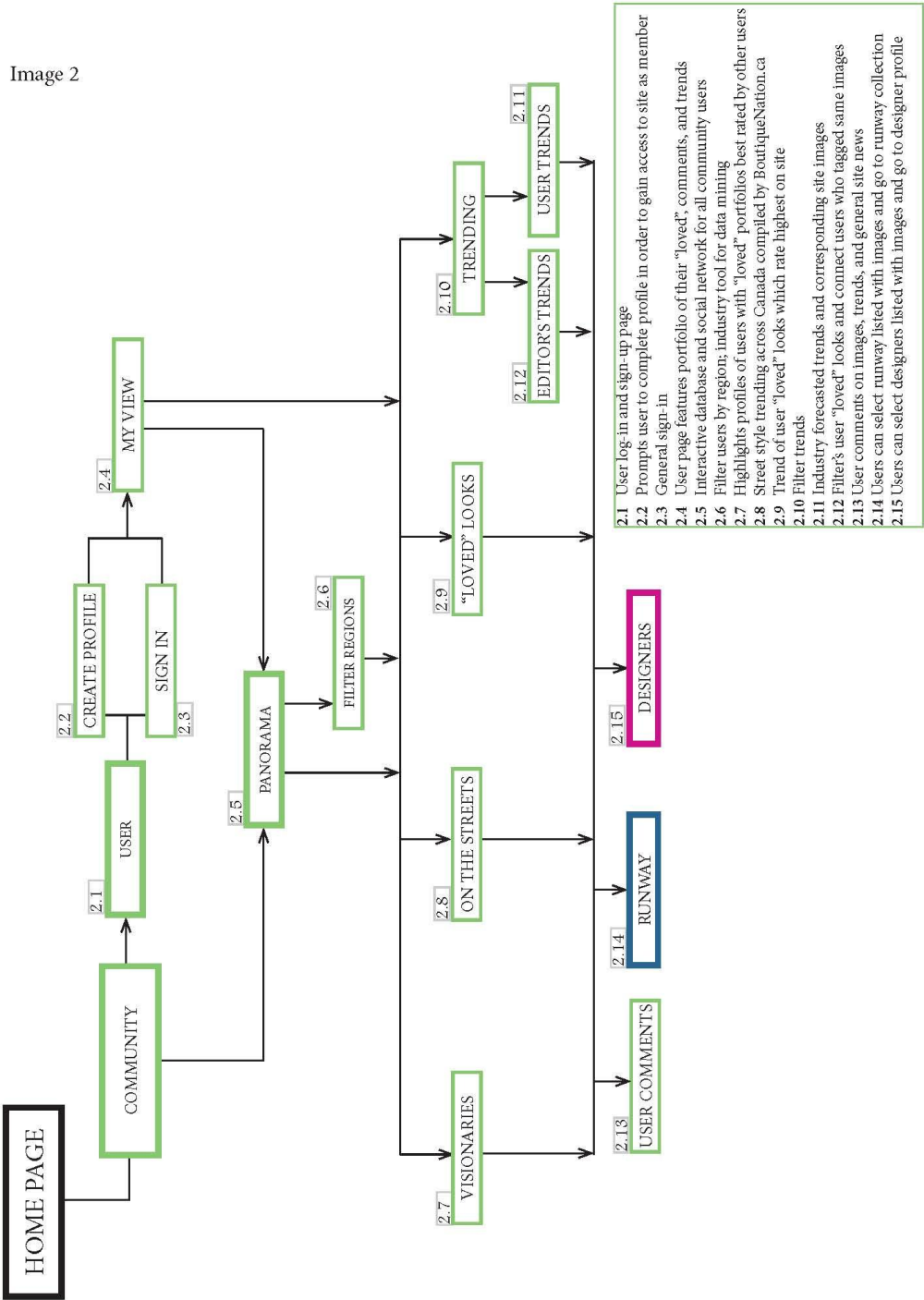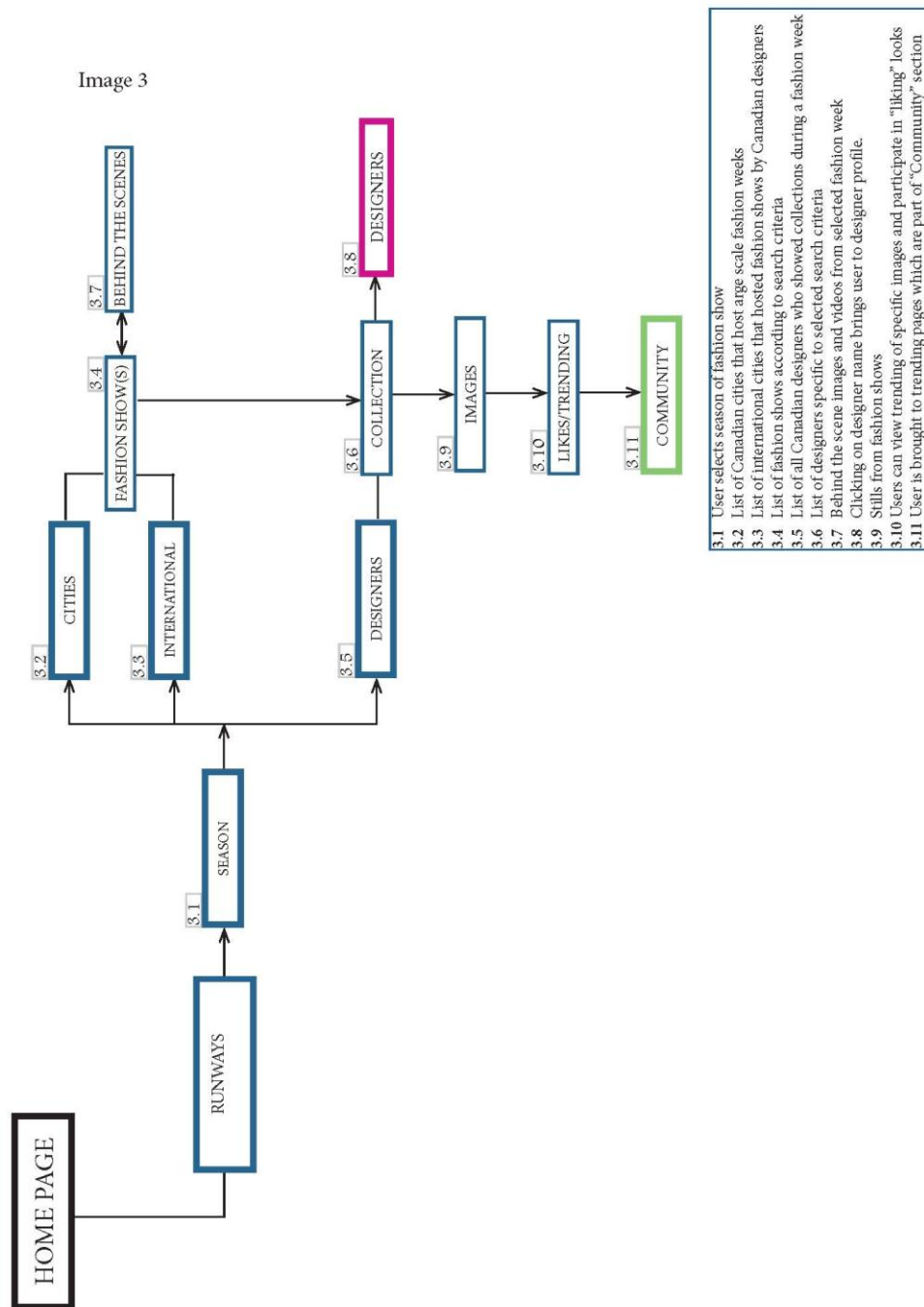
Image 2

This site map shows the second-level branch "Community" and its subsequent navigation.

Image 3

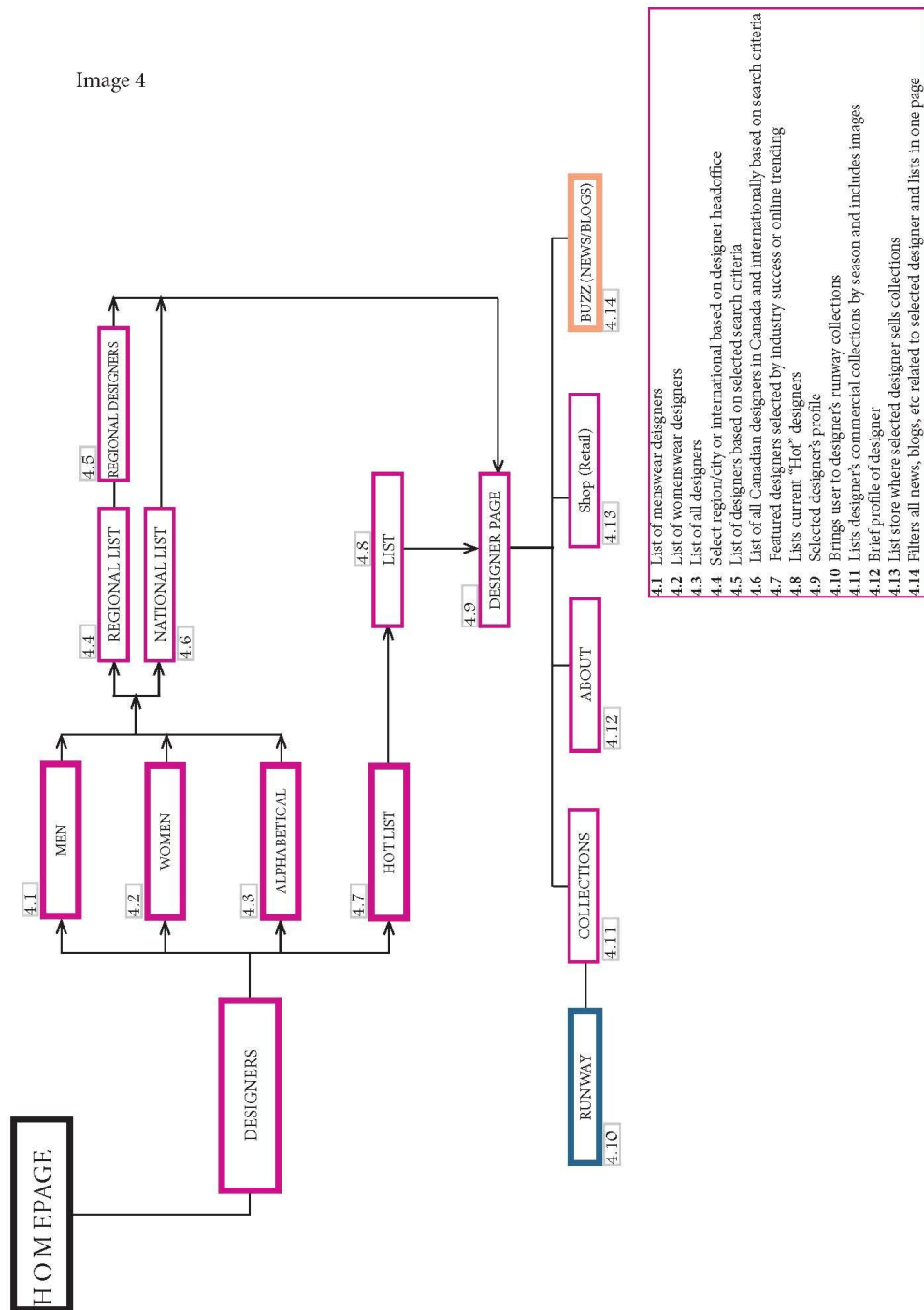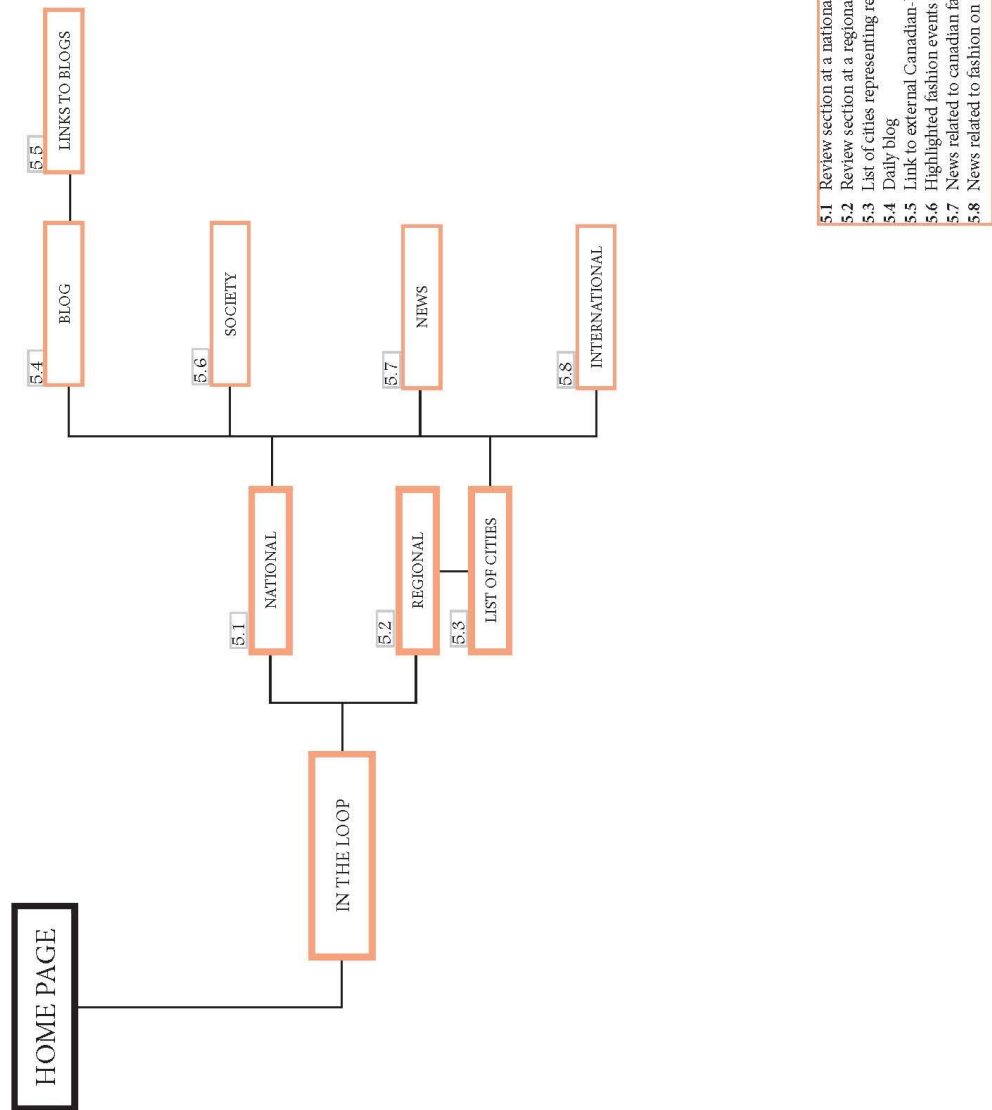This site map shows the second-level branch "Runway" and its subsequent navigation.

Image 4

HOMEPAGE

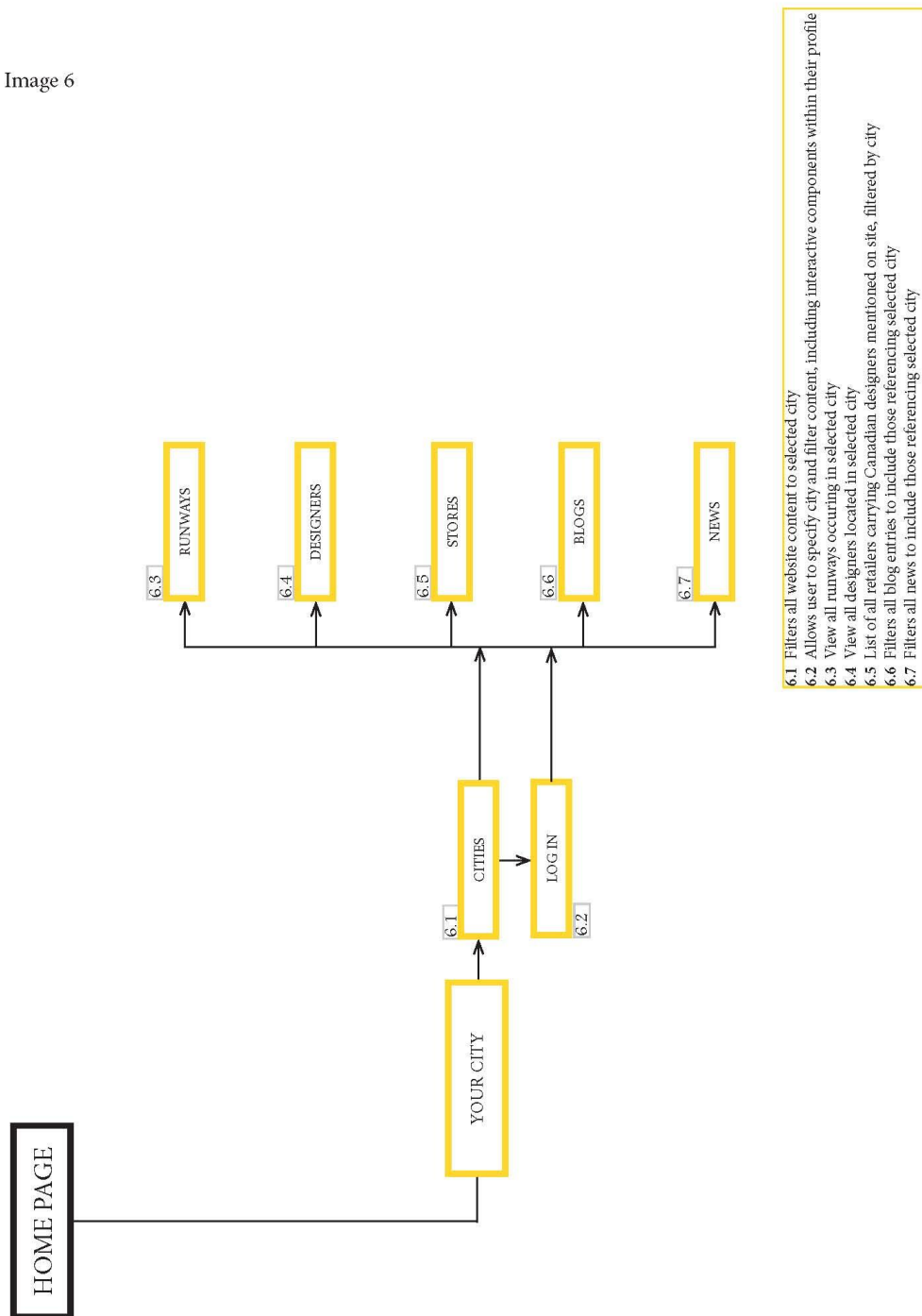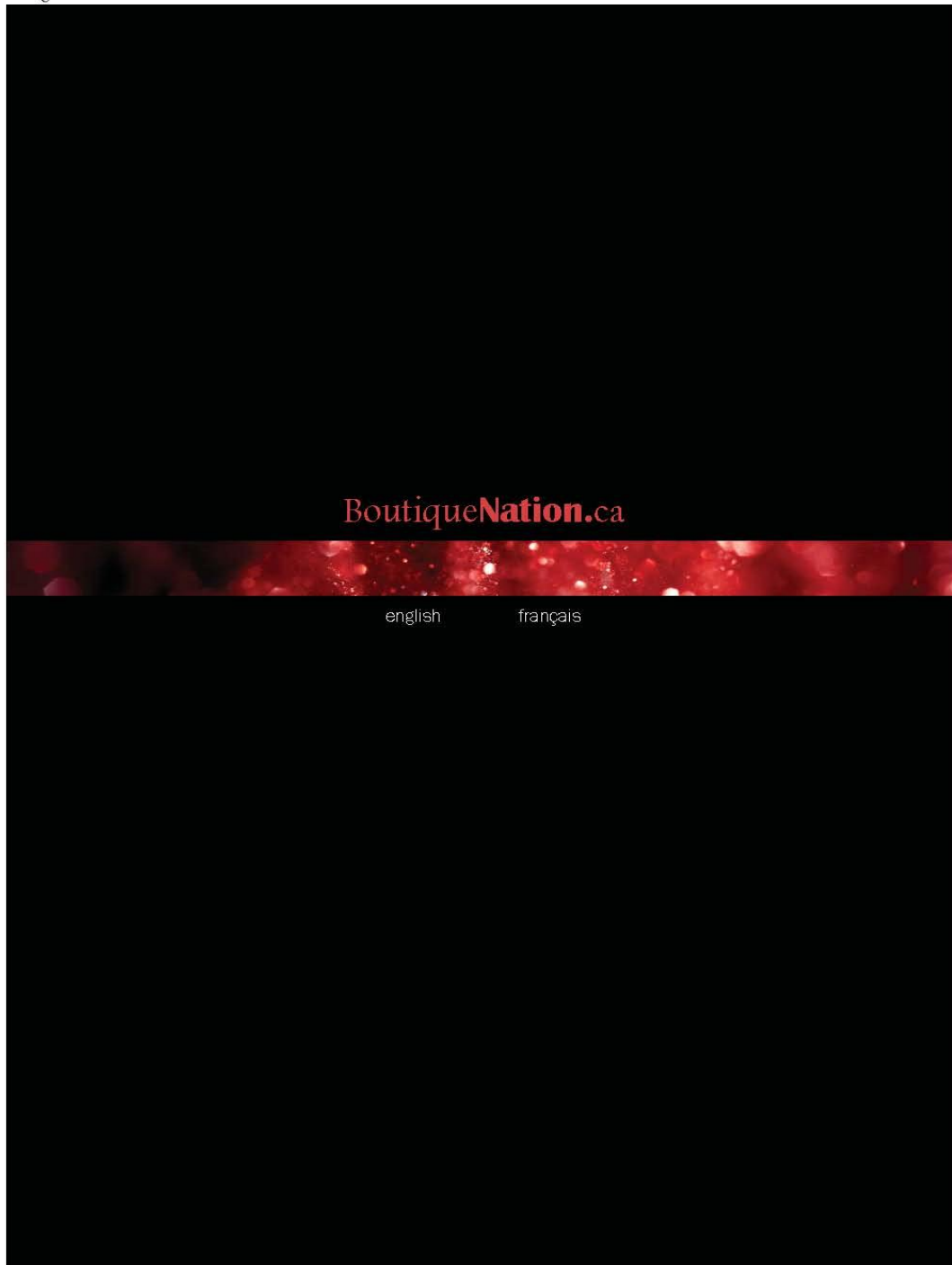DESIGNERS

4.1 MEN
4.2 WOMEN
4.3 ALPHABETICAL

4.4 REGIONAL LIST
4.5 REGIONAL DESIGNERS
4.6 NATIONAL LIST

4.7 HOT LIST
4.8 LIST

4.9 DESIGNER PAGE

4.10 RUNWAY
4.11 COLLECTIONS
4.12 ABOUT
4.13 Shop (Retail)
4.14 BUZZ (NEWS/BLOGS)

4.1 List of menswear designers
4.2 List of womenswear designers
4.3 List of all designers
4.4 Select region/city or international based on designer headoffice
4.5 List of designers based on selected search criteria
4.6 List of all Canadian designers in Canada and internationally based on search criteria
4.7 Featured designers selected by industry success or online trending
4.8 Lists current "Hot" designers
4.9 Selected designer's profile
4.10 Brings user to designer's runway collections
4.11 Lists designer's commercial collections by season and includes images
4.12 Brief profile of designer
4.13 List store where selected designer sells collections
4.14 Filters all news, blogs, etc related to selected designer and lists in one page

Image 4

This site map shows the second-level branch "Designers" and its subsequent navigation.

47

Image 5

5.1	Review section at a national-level
5.2	Review section at a regional-level
5.3	List of cities representing regions
5.4	Daily blog
5.5	Link to external Canadian-based blogs
5.6	Highlighted fashion events and profiles of fashionable Canadians
5.7	News related to canadian fashion and designers
5.8	News related to fashion on a global level, including trend reports.

Image 5

This site map shows the second-level branch "In the Loop" and its subsequent navigation.

Image 6

HOME PAGE

YOUR CITY

6.1 CITIES → 6.2 LOG IN

6.3 RUNWAYS
6.4 DESIGNERS
6.5 STORES
6.6 BLOGS
6.7 NEWS

6.1 Filters all website content to selected city
6.2 Allows user to specify city and filter content, including interactive components within their profile
6.3 View all runways occuring in selected city
6.4 View all designers located in selected city
6.5 List of all retailers carrying Canadian designers mentioned on site, filtered by city
6.6 Filters all blog entries to include those referencing selected city
6.7 Filters all news to include those referencing selected city

Image 6

This site map shows the second-level branch "Your City" and its subsequent navigation.

Image 7

<u>Image 7</u>

The bilingual splash page ensures all Canadians have access to information in the language of their choice. Based on cookies, if a user has already created a profile with a language preference, the splash page will automatically be skipped and instead the homepage will be displayed. Users who are not signed in will begin on the splash page. If users wish to switch language selection while browsing the site, a language toggle is available in top right corner of every site page.

The official domain name is BoutiqueNation.ca, though NationBoutique.ca will redirect users to the same splash page, only with the French title displayed.

Image 8
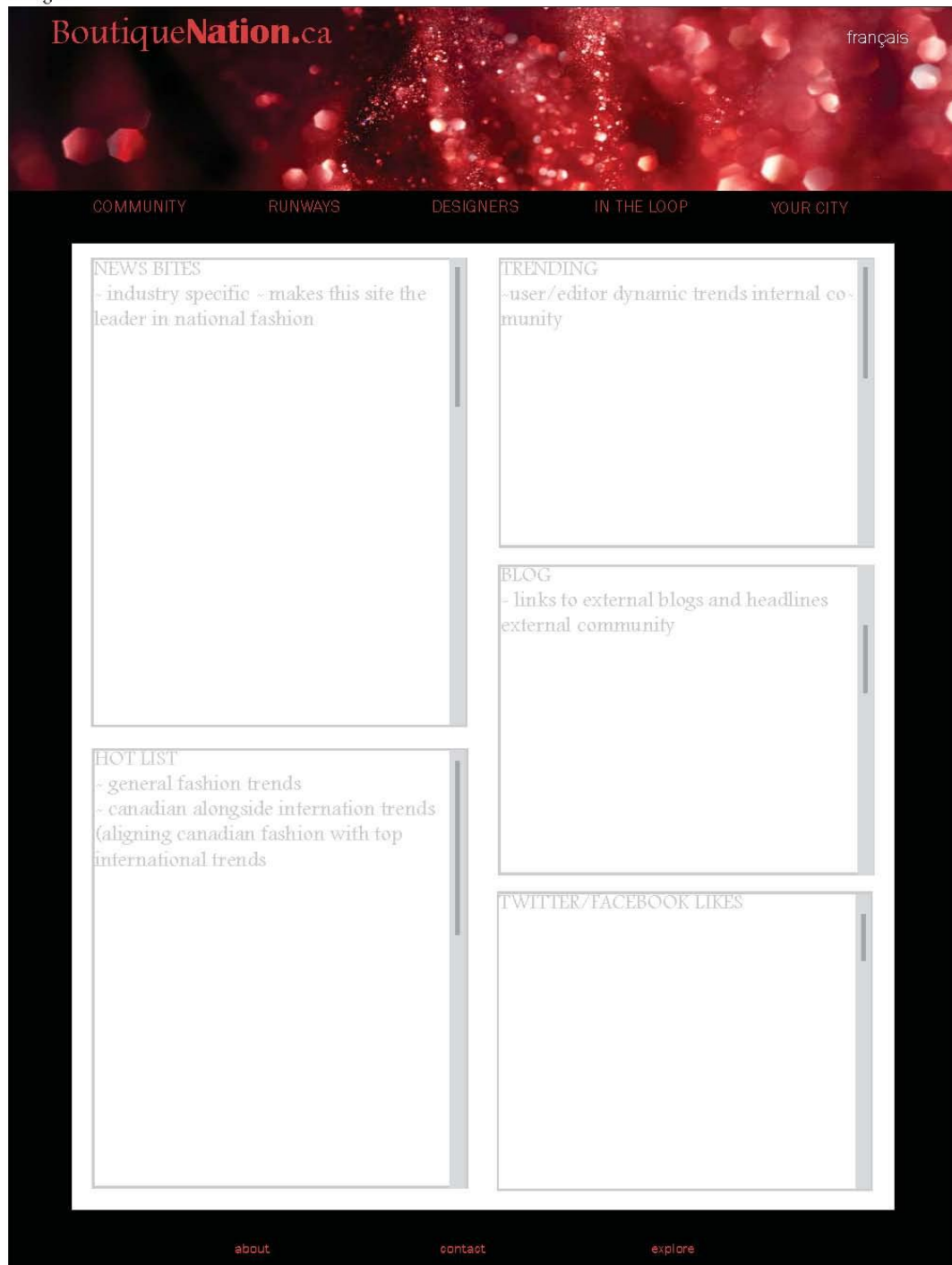
Image 8

The homepage of the site features content from various sections of the site and is intended to encapsulate the website, communicating the snap shots the main sections. This is to entice users to continue beyond the homepage by appealing to a variety of interests, such as news, designer profiles, or slideshows.

Image 9

Image 9

This page is an example of the sign-in page. "My View" is the user's personal account and store user selections, preferences, likes, etc. The privacy policy is posted on the login and sign-up pages due to the nature of information transference on the site, which encourages users to interact with one another and share information. The privacy guidelines of the site have not been outlined, but would cover identity, contact information, and how the information may be used by outside parties to collect data. Because the site is in the initial stages of being constructed, the relationship with external parties has not been established and the site currently focuses on the user experience. That being said, the intention of the site is to function as a resource for external data retrieval which centres on consumer preferences in Canada.

Image 10

Image 10

This sign-up page is designed to retrieve information that will later be used in the development of a data-retrieval system intended to be used by external companies for the purpose of marketing and promoting Canadian designers to Canadians. Asterix symbols denote mandatory fields.
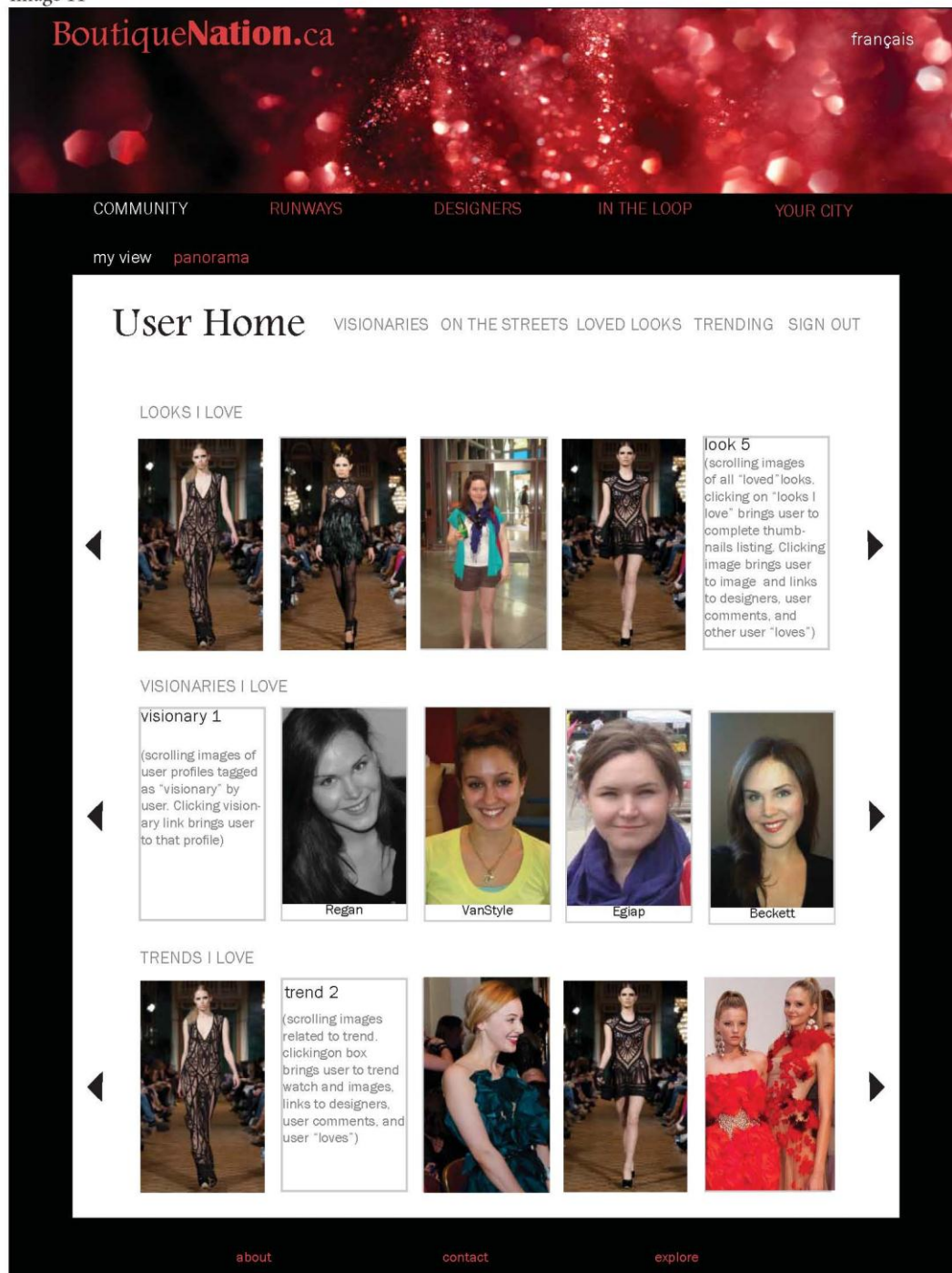
Image 11

Once signed in, a user's "My View" landing page presents images categorized into sections based on various themes. The images have been selected, or "tagged", by the user as favourites. This section is referred to as a user portfolio, as it compromises a curated collection of images the user likes on the site. Other users can view these portfolios and "like" them. Portfolios that rate high amongst users through "likes" are featured as "Visionaries". "Visionaries" are the online equivalent of fashion leaders who are prominent in fashion capitals, and are often editors, creative directors, stylists, or even socialites. "Trends I Love" are a compilation of "tagged" or "liked" images that the user found in the trends portion of the website, located under "Community", "Panorama". This section features trends according to fashion industry experts, as well as site user trends, according to looks that have a large number of "likes".
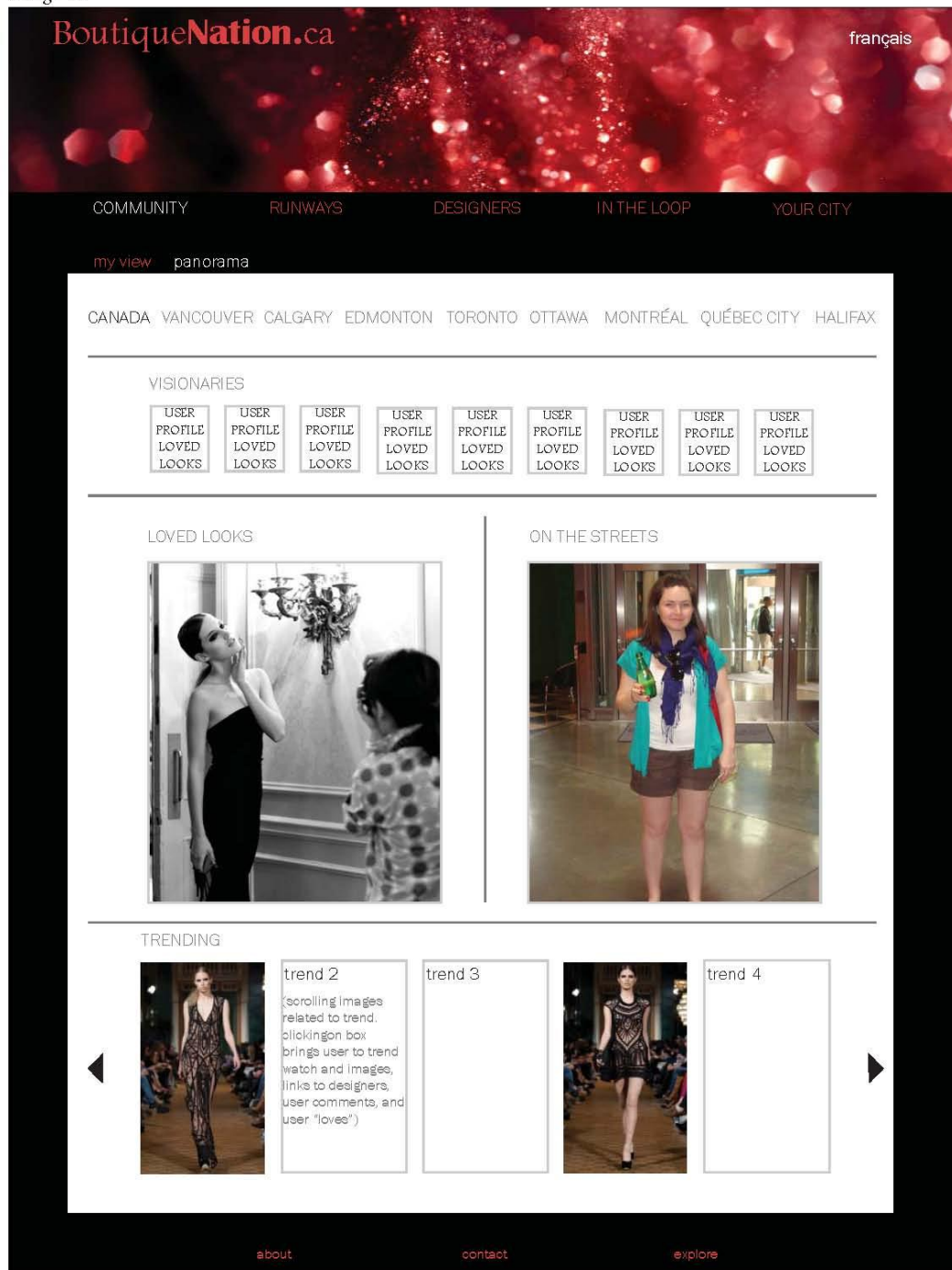
Image 12

Image 12

"Panorama", a portion of "Community", is designed to represent the collective perspective of the site's users. This feature gives an overview of up-to-date trends, street styles, and user profiles based on the section or region selected. The user can select specific cities to review, filtering the content to represent a selected region. Each image is tagged with "trending" characteristics, such as fabrication, colours, region, silhouette, etc. The purpose of trending each image is to encourage users to explore alternative designers who have made pieces that match their aesthetic preferences. For instance, an image of a black lace dress will offer trending characteristics of "black". Selecting "black" will open a new page of all relevant images in the same season as the original image that have also trended "black". This broadens the user's knowledge of designers who are creating clothes that suit their style.
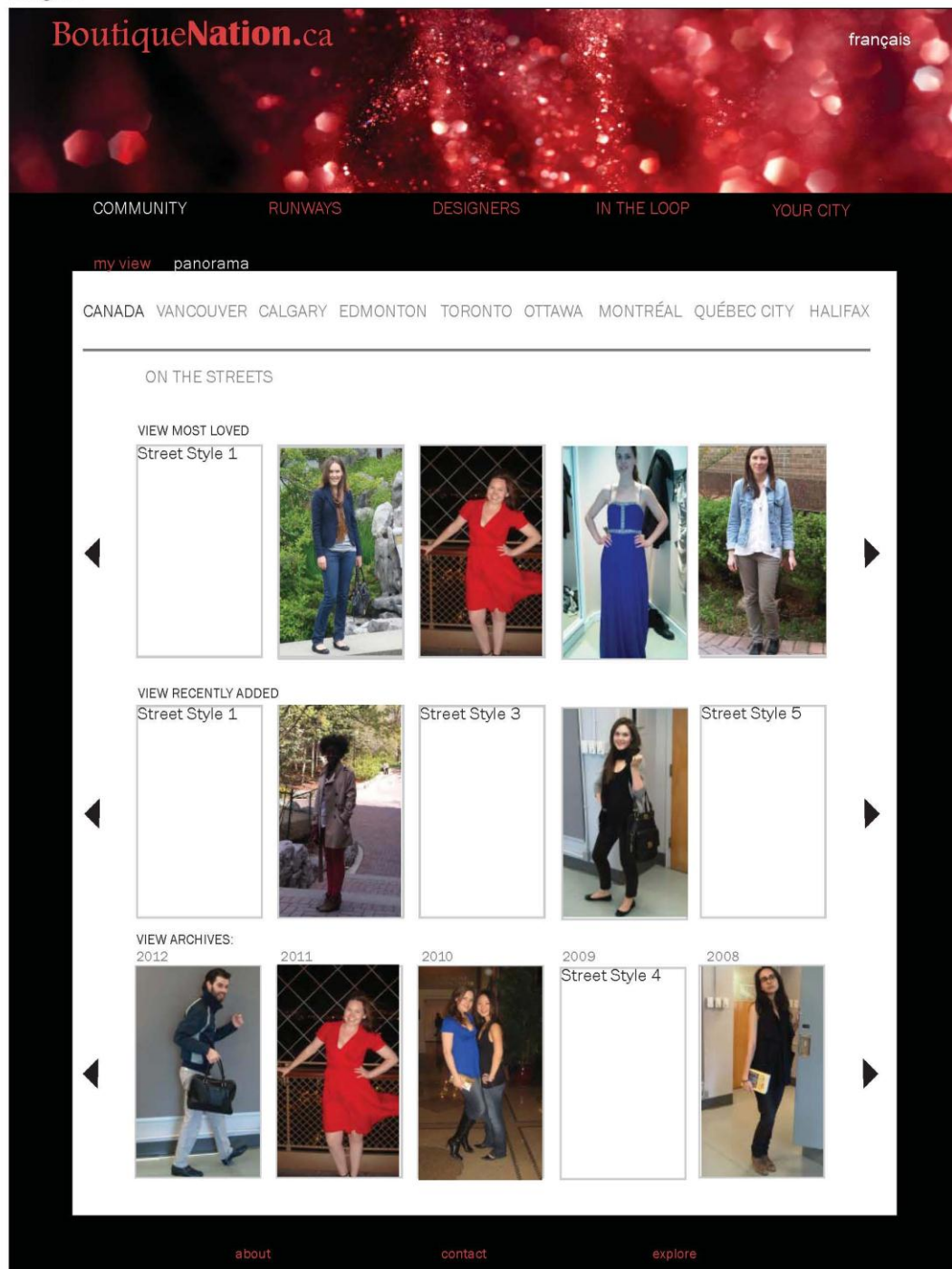
Image 13

Image 13

This "On the Streets" image shows how thumbnails are displayed and categorized. Scrolling options on main pages are featured, though clicking on subheadings, such as "Archives", brings the user to all thumbnails within that category. They are then laid out in album format with up to 12 images per page instead of featuring a scrolling bar.
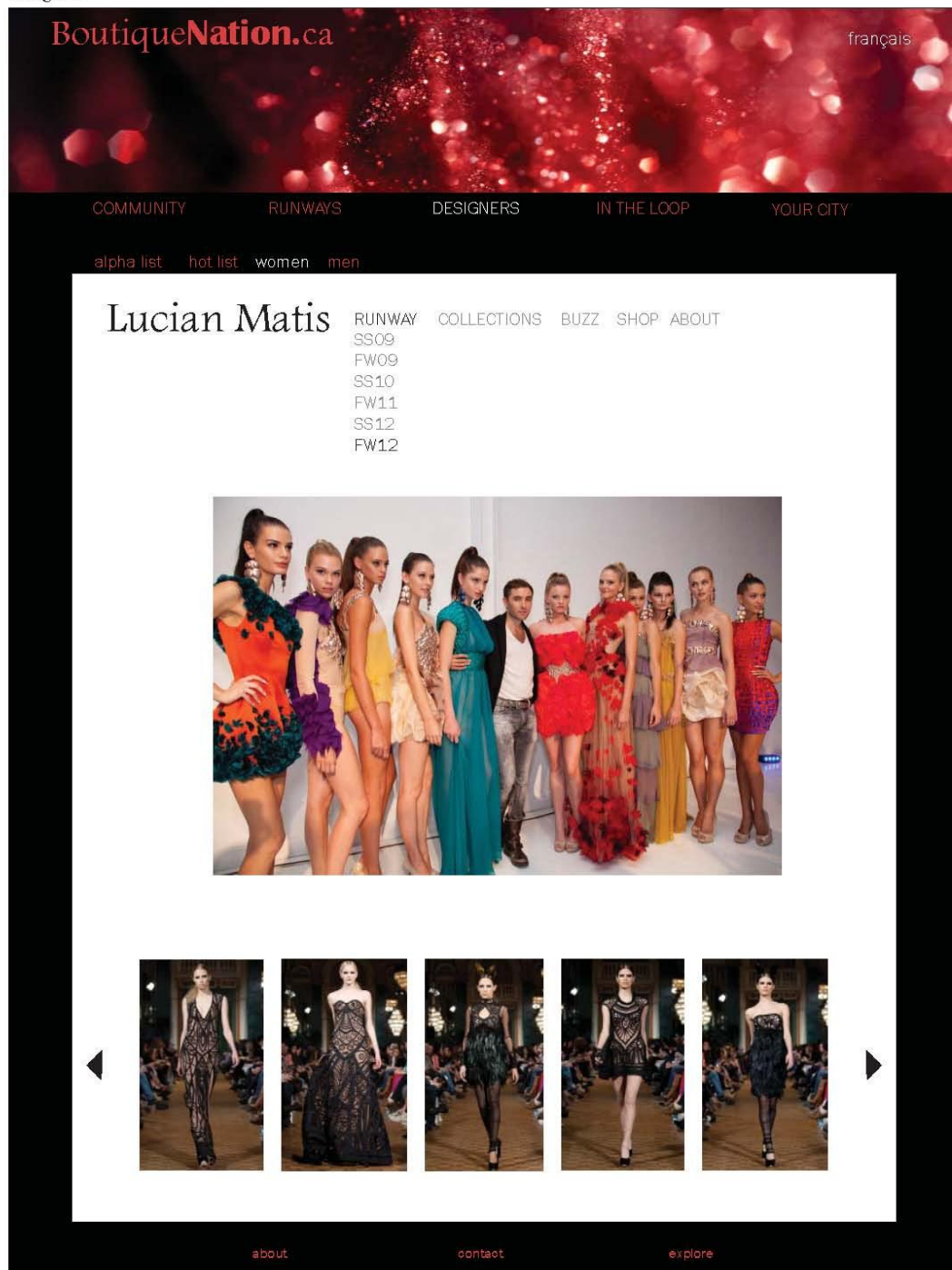
Image 14

Image 14

This image is an example of the "Designer" index page. The user has scrolled over the "Runway" button, and the drop down menu has appeared. Within this particular drop down menu, the user is presented with every collection the designer has presented on one of the featured runways. The large picture is the permanent profile image of the designer, showcasing the fashion they produce. Through feedback from the respondents of the interview, it became evident that the celebrity of a designer should not overshadow the fashion they produce. Many respondents noted that aesthetics are the initial feature of fashion and the most important characteristic of a designer's business; designer profile rating not as important.
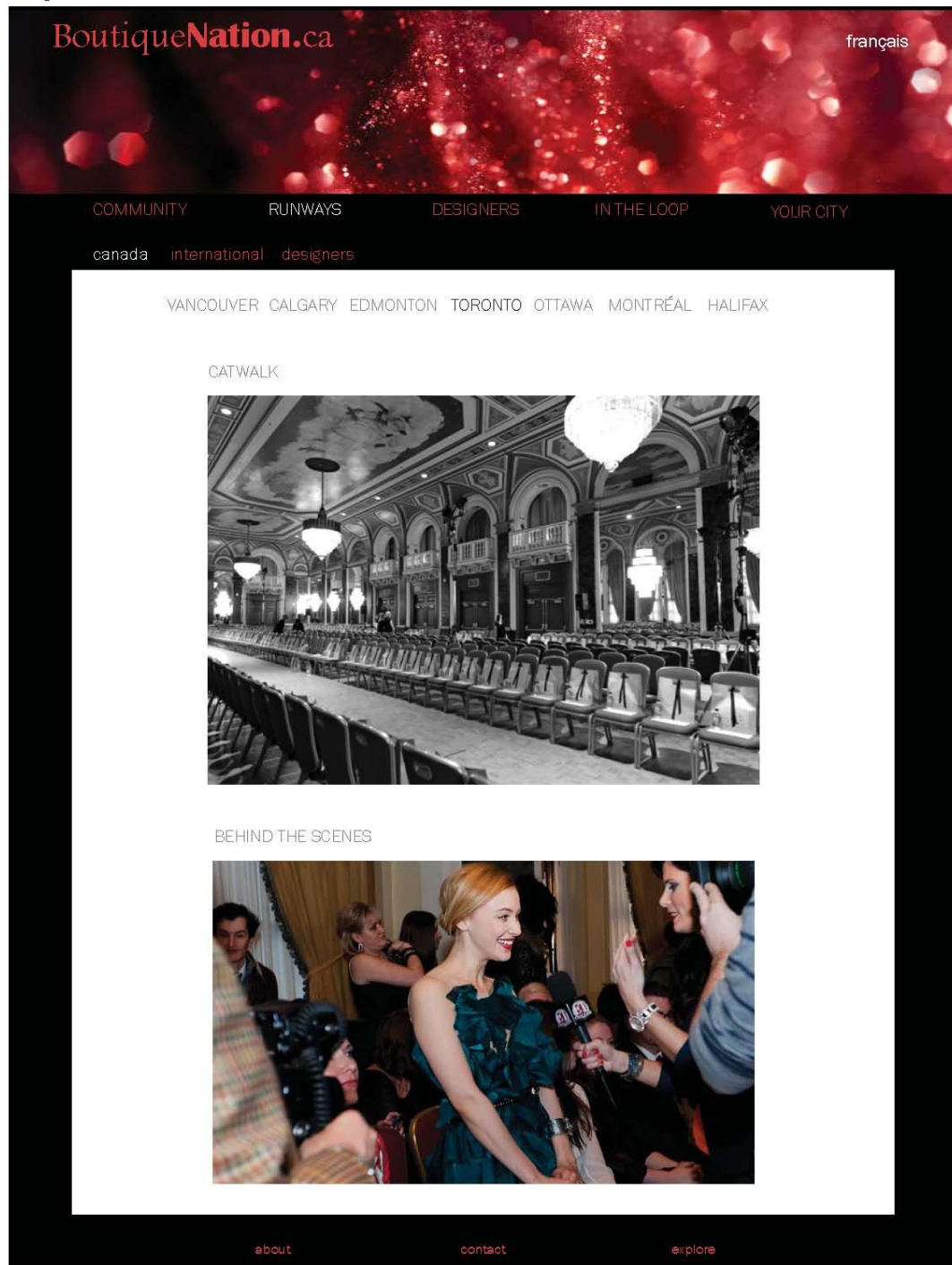
Image 15

Image 15

This page is part of the "Runway" section which is broken into two parts: "Catwalk" and "Behind the Scenes". "Catwalk" brings users to the featured runway collections, displayed as thumbnails that can be expanded to fit the whole screen. Each image is tagged for trending characteristics. "Behind the Scenes" includes videos of featured fashions shows, interviews with designers, personalities, and reporters. Review sound bites are included and link to full reviews of the shows which are part of "In the Loop" and also featured on designer profiles under "Buzz".
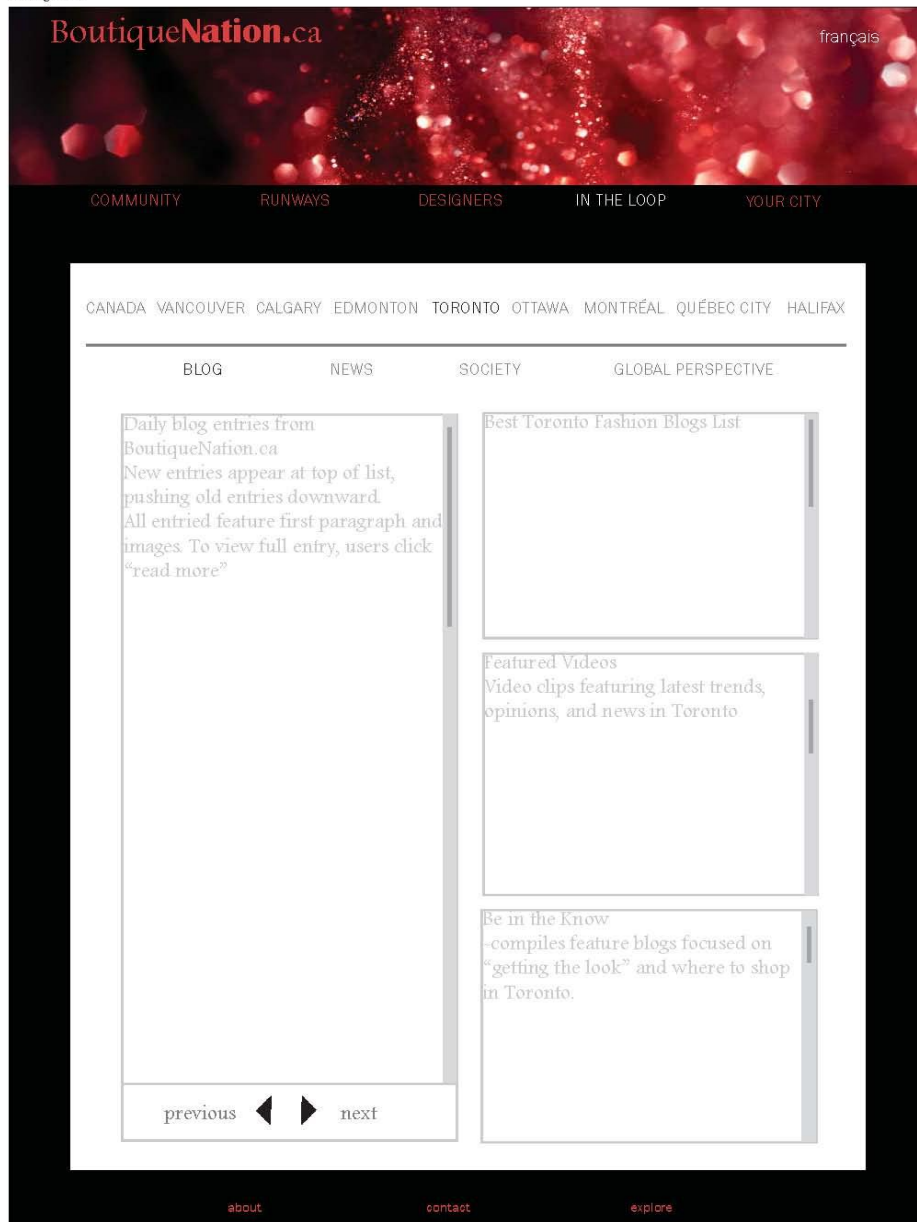
Image 16

Image 16

"In the Loop" is the portion of the website featuring the most written content, as the majority of the site was designed for the individual visual experience, and the social interactions among all users. The content within this section predominantly focuses on Canadian fashion news, events, and pop-culture blogs, however there is the inclusion of some international news, intended to make this site a relevant and global information resource for domestic and international users. Though the focus is on Canadian fashion, it is necessary that the international fashion industry be included in order to offer context of how Canadian fashion fits internationally, as well as for Canadian design to participate in the context of the global fashion community. The purpose of this website is to remove perceived regional borders in Canada so as to allow the fashion industry to grow beyond current selling regions. Isolating Canadians from the global fashion community through the exclusion of relevant international news and events will diminish the purpose of this site, which is to place Canadian fashion among global fashion leaders. Users of this website are likely to also use other fashion websites. By including links to recommended blogs, websites, or developing information that is up-to-date and relevant, will encourage users to continue using this site to receive their fashion information. The news and blogs in this section are produced by BoutiqueNation.ca and include advice columns for styling, shopping, and other topics that are user-centric in nature.

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