



## Fashion As A Tool Of Statecraft: Examining The Influence Of The French Fashion Industry On Public Diplomacy

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### Abstract

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*Fashion is indeed considered a significant aspect of French culture and is often associated with the national branding of France. The country has a rich history and tradition in the world of fashion, and French fashion designers, brands, and styles have had a profound influence on the global fashion industry. This research aims to look at how influential the fashion industry is on French public diplomacy. In compiling this research, the authors used qualitative research methods and used data collection methods from the library research. It involves exploring existing literature, published materials, and academic sources to gain insights, support arguments, and develop a comprehensive understanding of a particular topic. The fashion industry in France has long been recognized as a significant component of the country's cultural and creative identity. It plays a crucial role in promoting public diplomacy, which refers to the use of cultural, educational, and informational resources to build relationships, shape perceptions, and enhance a nation's reputation on the global stage. Through its cultural diplomacy efforts, it serves as a tool for soft power projection.*

**Keywords:** France, Fashion Industry, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power.

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## INTRODUCTION

Fashion is indeed considered a significant aspect of French culture and is often associated with the national branding of France. The country has a rich history and tradition in the world of fashion, and French fashion designers, brands, and styles have had a profound influence on the global fashion industry. France has been a hub of creativity and innovation in fashion for centuries. Paris, the capital city, is widely recognized as one of the fashion capitals of the world, along with cities like Milan, London, and New York. It is home to prestigious fashion events, such as Paris Fashion Week, where designers showcase their latest collections.

French fashion is often characterized by elegance, sophistication, and a sense of timeless style. French designers are renowned for their attention to detail, craftsmanship, and haute couture, which refers to high-end custom-made clothing. Brands like Chanel, Dior, Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Givenchy are internationally recognized for their iconic designs and luxurious products. The French fashion industry also plays a significant role in the country's economy. It generates substantial revenue, provides employment opportunities, and attracts tourists from around the world who are eager to experience the allure of French fashion. The association of fashion with the national branding of France is well-deserved due to

the country's historical contributions, influential designers, iconic brands, and its ongoing impact on the global fashion landscape.

Nation branding is another type of initiative that may be considered separately from public diplomacy. Whether public diplomacy is viewed as part of the national brand, or national branding as a form of public diplomacy, practice relies primarily on strategic design and dissemination of information to target audiences (Snow & Taylor, 2009). In this case, French public diplomacy, also known as "diplomatie d'influence" or "diplomatie publique" in French, has a long history that dates back several centuries. As we may know, diplomacy is a crucial part of international relations. Many aspects of life are governed by diplomacy, such as how the influence of other states' culture affects other states, which directly affects people in other states (Pamungkas, 2022).

French diplomacy has a long history dating back to the 15th to 19th century. French diplomacy has changed over the centuries, from theater diplomacy to classical music. The influence of French culture is rooted in food, language, art and intellectual achievements through institutions such as the Alliance Française and the French cultural centers known as "Instituts Français" established around the world. French public diplomacy has also influenced the world with public diplomacy programs such as foreign policy analysis, marketing, public relations, international communication and its practitioners (Pamungkas, 2022).

During the era of French colonialism, which lasted from the 16th to the 20th century, France also projected its power and influence through its colonies. This influence extended to cultural, educational, and linguistic aspects, with French institutions and practices being introduced in colonized regions. France is known for its soft power, which refers to the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. French cinema, literature, fashion, cuisine, and art have been instrumental in projecting French cultural influence globally. French fashion designers like Coco Chanel and Yves Saint Laurent have contributed to the country's soft power image. France has established a vast network of diplomatic missions, cultural centers, and international organizations to promote its public diplomacy efforts.

French public diplomacy continues to evolve in the modern era, leveraging various strategies and tools to project its influence and promote its interests globally. France maintains a strong focus on cultural diplomacy, promoting its arts, literature, cinema, music, and heritage to enhance its global image. The French cultural centers, such as the Institut Français and Alliance Française, continue to organize cultural events, exhibitions, and language programs worldwide. These institutions foster cultural exchanges, promote the French language, and facilitate dialogue between French and foreign artists, intellectuals, and academics.

With the rise of digital platforms and social media, France has embraced digital diplomacy as a means to engage with global audiences. The French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and other government institutions use social media channels, websites, and digital campaigns to disseminate information, share cultural content, and promote French values, initiatives, and policies. Digital diplomacy also enables interactive and direct engagement with international audiences. The rise of French luxury goods also followed the growth of the country's industry. Housing

catered to the tastes of a new wealthy industrial class that sought quality and tradition and consumed fashion, perfumes and cosmetics (Mendes, 2015).

This research aims to look at how influential the fashion industry is on French public diplomacy, which today encompasses a multi-faceted approach that combines cultural diplomacy, digital outreach, etc. Through this research, will further discuss about the role of the French government in their own fashion industry (strategy and opportunities). Then, it will answer a question which is the main idea in this research for "How the fashion industry can influence French public diplomacy?".

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Public Diplomacy***

In this research, the authors will use the theory of Public Diplomacy as a research basis. A public diplomacy inevitably comes with power. Nye defines power as " the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants" (Snow & Taylor, 2009). Public diplomacy can be defined as the use of communication, engagement, and relationship-building strategies by governments and non-state actors to promote their country's values, culture, policies, and interests to foreign publics. Define public diplomacy as advancing national interests by informing and influencing citizens of other countries. Two aspects of this definition are important.

First, public diplomacy is aimed at citizens of other countries. Standard Diplomacy is aimed at leaders of other governments and political groups. In the best traditions of democracy, public diplomacy is aimed at individuals and political groups in these countries. Second, the public diplomacy is to advance national interests through influence. Influence here means changing public opinion, beliefs, actions, expectations, and perspectives (Snow & Taylor, 2009). It involves engaging with foreign audiences, opinion leaders, and civil society to foster understanding, mutual respect, and dialogue in order to influence perceptions and build positive relationships on the international stage.

Public diplomacy seeks to shape a country's image, reputation, and soft power by utilizing various channels, including cultural exchanges, media engagement, educational initiatives, digital platforms, and public outreach activities. The ultimate goal of public diplomacy is to create a favorable environment for achieving a country's foreign policy objectives and advancing its national interests. Public diplomacy refers to the efforts undertaken by a government to engage with foreign publics, opinion leaders, and civil society in order to promote its country's values, culture, policies, and interests. It is a strategic communication process aimed at building relationships, fostering understanding, and influencing perceptions in the international arena.

Public diplomacy is a dynamic and evolving field that requires effective communication strategies, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability to changing global dynamics. It aims to shape perceptions, influence public opinion, build relationships, and create a conducive environment for achieving a country's foreign policy goals. Finally, public diplomacy can also be used to support other foreign policy tools such as economic, diplomatic and military operations (Snow & Taylor, 2009).

### ***Soft Power***

To strengthen the research, the author uses another theory such as Soft Power as a research basis. Soft power refers to the ability of a country or actor to influence others and shape their behavior through non-coercive means, such as culture, values, policies, and attraction, rather than relying solely on military or economic power. Soft power is the use of the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies to induce others to admire those ideals (Snow & Taylor, 2009). In other words, it is the power of persuasion, appeal, and credibility that allows a country to achieve its objectives by attracting and influencing others voluntarily.

Soft power is based on the ability to shape preferences and create a positive image and reputation that garners respect and admiration, ultimately leading to the desired outcomes without the use of force or coercion. Coined by Joseph Nye, soft power recognizes that a country's influence can stem from its attractiveness, credibility, and the ability to persuade and inspire others. Soft power is not coercive and relies on attraction rather than force. It complements hard power, which involves military capabilities and economic leverage. Soft power allows countries to shape the international environment, build networks, and gain influence through the power of ideas, culture, and shared values.

There is a soft power advantage can be measured along several dimensions; First, when cultures and beliefs conform to prevailing global norms. Second, when nations have improved access to multiple communication channels that can influence how issues are covered in the global news media. Third, where national credibility is reinforced by domestic and international actions (Snow & Taylor, 2009).

## **METHODS**

In compiling this research, the authors used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods are a set of techniques used to gather and analyze non-numerical data to gain insights into social phenomena. Qualitative research is characterized by its exploratory nature and the emphasis it places on context, complexity, and depth of understanding. It aims to go beyond mere description and seeks to uncover the underlying meanings and patterns that shape human behavior, beliefs, and interactions. Qualitative research methods typically involve collecting data through methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis.

### **Library Research**

This research used data collection methods from the library research. It involves exploring existing literature, published materials, and academic sources to gain insights, support arguments, and develop a comprehensive understanding of a particular topic. In collecting data, the author involves secondary sources. Secondary sources themselves are sources of information obtained from previous research by other authors. Usually, secondary sources refer to primary sources that prove that these sources are accurate. Likewise, news or websites accessed on the Internet are guaranteed to be accurate. Some come from official government websites, so the data obtained is reliable and relevant to the research being discussed.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

### ***Results***

#### **1. The Binding Tie Between Fashion Industry and Public Diplomacy in France**

Back then, the French authorities gave fashion two distinct roles in French diplomacy in the 1960s and 1970s, with one taking over the other from the mid-1970s. With the dematerialization of fashion in the 1960s and 1970s, and changes in consumption patterns and fashion systems due to changing socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts, the role of fashion's intangible but broader branding has become increasingly textile-centric (Dubé-Sénécal, 2022). Back in time even further, in 1776, Benjamin Franklin visited France to meet Louis XVI. To announce his ambassadorial certification, he wore a fur cap to keep his head warm. The French admired his appearance as a "tough American pioneer" so much that they ordered more hats to wear when visiting. Franklin chose the hat out of necessity and to breathe fresh air into a country weary of the gilded excesses of Marie Antoinette's court (Kanowitz, 2019). Those, in other words, has shown the existence of a relationship between fashion and French diplomacy, where the government at that time had given fashion a distinct role. Not only that, through fashion it has indirectly created an influence for a long time. In this case, Benjamin Franklin's presence in France with his cap on had the effect of at least keeping the two countries in bondage.

The fashion industry in France today has long been recognized as a significant component of the country's cultural and creative identity. It plays a crucial role in promoting public diplomacy, which refers to the use of cultural, educational, and informational resources to build relationships, shape perceptions, and enhance a nation's reputation on the global stage. That's because people in diplomatic community recognize and enjoy the role of fashion in diplomacy. Just as food, art, and sports say a lot about a country's culture, so does fashion. The idea of using fashion as a forum for public diplomacy has been around for quite some time (Kanowitz, 2019). The binding tie between the fashion industry and public diplomacy in France can be understood through several things.

First, fashion serves as a powerful cultural ambassador for France, showcasing its artistic heritage, craftsmanship, and innovation. French fashion designers, brands, and haute couture houses are internationally renowned for their creativity, style, and elegance. By promoting French fashion globally, France presents itself as a country of sophistication, luxury, and artistic excellence.

Second, the fashion industry acts as a form of soft power, which involves exerting influence and shaping perceptions through cultural means. French fashion, with its iconic brands like Chanel, Dior, and Louis Vuitton, embodies an aspirational lifestyle and influences global trends. This projection of style and influence reinforces France's image as a center of fashion and enhances its soft power on the world stage.

Third, the fashion industry contributes significantly to the French economy. It generates employment, drives exports, and attracts international investment. Through fashion diplomacy, France promotes its fashion industry as an economic powerhouse, fostering trade relationships and partnerships with other countries.

Fourth, fashion events, such as Paris Fashion Week, serve as platforms for diplomacy and cultural exchange. They bring together designers, industry professionals, celebrities, and influencers from around the world, fostering networking opportunities and promoting international collaborations. The presence of foreign designers and media during these events strengthens diplomatic ties and enhances cultural understanding.

Fifth, French fashion represents a distinct national identity and serves as a symbol of French culture and heritage. It embodies the values of elegance, creativity, and craftsmanship that are associated with France. By promoting and preserving its fashion industry, France strengthens its national brand and enhances its image as a country with a rich cultural legacy.

Sixth, the allure of French fashion contributes to the country's tourism industry. Fashion-conscious travelers are drawn to iconic shopping destinations like Paris, which is known for its fashion boutiques and luxury flagship stores. The fashion industry acts as a magnet for tourists, boosting the economy and promoting France as a top travel destination. The fashion industry in France and public diplomacy are intertwined in multiple ways. French fashion acts as a cultural and economic ambassador, projecting soft power, promoting national identity, and fostering diplomatic relationships. The global recognition and influence of French fashion contribute to France's overall public diplomacy efforts, helping to shape perceptions, strengthen relationships, and enhance its international reputation.

## **2. The Impacts of Fashion Industry on French National Development**

The French fashion industry plays a significant role in serving the national interest of France. The industry's impact extends beyond economic considerations and encompasses cultural, diplomatic, and social dimensions. The fashion industry is a major contributor to France's economy, generating revenue, employment, and export opportunities. The creation, production and sales of clothing, fashion accessories (shoes, leather goods, etc.), perfumes and cosmetics. Together these activities account for 1.7% of France's GDP (Google Arts & Culture). In particular, if employment in the service sector and its spillover effects are included, it will be 2.7%, for a total of 1 million jobs and 580,000 direct jobs (Export Promotion Office, 2018). Amazingly, this is more than the automotive and aerospace industries combined.

Fashion and luxury goods are important industries for the French economy. These contribute to France's image in the world and have positive side effects on other activities such as tourism and retail (Export Promotion Office, 2018). French fashion brands and designers are also globally recognized for their quality, craftsmanship, and creativity. The success of the fashion industry supports economic growth, creates jobs, and enhances the country's competitiveness in the global market with €150 billion in direct sales, of which €33 billion is exported from the French fashion sector (Export Promotion Office, 2018).

French fashion also serves as a cultural ambassador for France, promoting the country's artistic heritage, creativity, and lifestyle. It embodies the elegance, style, and sophistication associated with the French identity. Through the promotion of French fashion globally, France enhances its soft power, shaping perceptions and influencing cultural trends. This cultural promotion helps maintain and strengthen France's position as a global center of fashion and culture. To show the craft of

world designers, especially France, through Paris Fashion Week has provided an economic boost for France. The economics of Paris Fashion Week are impressive in and of themselves. Associated shows and events generate revenues of over €400 million per year, excluding fashion week-related trade fairs attended by tens of thousands of professionals from around the world, resulting in a total annual expenditure of over €12 billion (Google Arts & Culture).

In some cases, the French fashion industry contributes to diplomatic relations by fostering cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange. France hosts prestigious fashion events, such as Paris Fashion Week, which attract international designers, industry professionals, and media representatives. These events provide opportunities for diplomatic networking, cultural exchange, and building relationships with foreign partners. French fashion designers and brands often collaborate with international counterparts, promoting cross-cultural understanding and strengthening diplomatic ties. The allure of French fashion also acts as a magnet for tourists, boosting the country's tourism industry. France, with Paris as its fashion capital, attracts fashion-conscious travelers who visit iconic shopping districts, luxury boutiques, and fashion museums. The fashion industry contributes to projecting a positive image of France as a destination for fashion, style, and luxury, which in turn supports the tourism sector and overall national branding.

Furthermore, the French fashion industry contributes to education and skill development within the country. French fashion schools and institutes are globally renowned for providing high-quality education and training for aspiring designers, stylists, and industry professionals. This focus on education supports the development of local talent and ensures the industry's competitiveness and sustainability. French fashion is also facing the challenge of sustainable development. The brand that embodies French fashion plans to address this issue in the coming years, ensuring that environmental and social trust becomes the cornerstone of its identity (Google Arts & Culture). The French fashion industry is also known for its emphasis on craftsmanship, traditional techniques, and artisanal skills. By preserving and promoting these aspects, France protects its cultural heritage and reinforces its reputation as a country that values and sustains craftsmanship. This preservation of craftsmanship contributes to the national interest by maintaining the uniqueness and authenticity of French fashion.

### **3. French Government Strategies and Opportunities**

The world of French fashion is a dynamic field with a wonderful mix of skills. Creation, technical know-how, industrial know-how, digital, value chain management and distribution. At the heart of the fashion industry, the textile and clothing sector is currently the most prosperous sector. They are even more important to the French economy than the automotive and aviation sectors. The French luxury goods industry (with 270 luxury brands worldwide, 130 are French brands) is a strategic industry for France, a world leader in this field, with high growth rates, huge trade surpluses and strong prospects for development both in France and abroad (Export Promotion Office, 2018).

The French government then implements various strategies and seizes opportunities through the fashion industry to support its economic growth, promote cultural heritage, enhance soft power, and strengthen diplomatic relations. The French government provides support and incentives to the fashion industry,

including financial assistance, tax benefits, and access to resources. It collaborates with industry stakeholders, such as fashion federations, associations, and trade unions, to develop policies and initiatives that foster innovation, talent development, and competitiveness. The French government also invests in fashion education and training programs to nurture talent and ensure the industry's long-term success. It supports renowned fashion schools and institutes, such as the *École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*, and provides scholarships and grants to aspiring designers and students. These efforts contribute to the continuous development of skilled professionals within the fashion industry.

For the main reason, the French government leverages the fashion industry for diplomatic purposes, organizing events, exhibitions, and fashion shows to showcase French fashion talent and foster international collaborations. With over 300 fashion shows a year, the fashion week is a huge success, featuring not only French haute couture and ready-to-wear brands, but also international brands (up to 50%). Audience for this field of activity. This translates into more than €1.2 billion in annual economic benefits, including 10.3 billion commercial transactions (Export Promotion Office, 2018). To protect this kind of an intellectual property, the French government actively protects intellectual property rights in the fashion industry. It enforces copyright laws and supports anti-counterfeiting measures to safeguard the creative works of designers and brands. This protection encourages innovation, fosters a favorable business environment, and ensures that French fashion maintains its reputation for quality and authenticity.

Fashion and technology share a common history in terms of the development of techniques and tools. Interactive fashion design was almost non-existent before its introduction. In 2014, the French government launched a comprehensive industrial innovation plan, allocating a budget of €3.5 billion to 34 selected projects (Gras & Eliot, 2019). To promote sustainable and ethical practices within the fashion industry. The French government encourages designers and brands to adopt environmentally friendly production processes, reduce waste, and promote fair labor practices. Initiatives like the "Paris Good Fashion" charter and the Fashion Pact aim to make the French fashion industry more sustainable and responsible. Applying new technologies to the apparel end-use can improve the sustainability and productivity of the industry depending on the end-use. Many innovators in the fashion industry are looking for solutions that address both environmental and social issues, which often overlap (Gras & Eliot, 2019).

The French government also actively supports the export of French fashion products and services. It assists companies in expanding their global reach by organizing trade missions, participating in international trade fairs, and facilitating access to foreign markets. These efforts create opportunities for French fashion businesses to grow and increase their international presence. Overall, the French government seizes opportunities presented by the fashion industry to drive economic growth, promote French culture, enhance soft power, strengthen diplomatic relations, attract tourists, foster innovation, and preserve cultural heritage. By supporting and strategically leveraging the fashion industry, the government maximizes the benefits and opportunities available to promote the interests of France.

### ***Discussion***

Based from the result of this research, finally we may conclude the final thought about how the fashion industry can influence French public diplomacy. If we go back in time, according to Frans & Aryani (2020) Fashion in France has a long history. Paris has been the fashion capital of Europe since the 17th century and is still known as the fashion capital of the country. The spread of democracy and the rise of industrialization in the 19th century made fashion even more popular. Mass-produced top fashion brands (haute couture) were developing in France. This shows a fact where fashion has become an "icon" that is unique to France. Where for a long time fashion has grown rapidly and is now very big in France, so that the nickname of France as a country with a fashion city is very well known throughout the world. Not only that, Fashion is one of the driving forces of the French economy. Fashion and luxury goods are French excellence and international success. Achieving economic gains and economic growth is a strength for France (Frans & Aryani, 2020).

In the term of cultural diplomacy, Pajtinka (2014) defines that there are various definitions in contemporary diplomatic theory and practice. Depending on the context of the topic under discussion and on the actual practical needs, in fact, the definition of cultural diplomacy largely reflects the efforts of many scholars and practitioners to highlight some aspect of this phenomenon. In practice, most activities within the framework of cultural diplomacy tend to focus on the general public abroad and can therefore also be considered part of public diplomacy (Pajtinka, 2014). In other words, in this case cultural diplomacy can be considered as part of public diplomacy. Then, from the discussion regarding this research on the fashion industry, we can draw an understanding where the fashion industry in France through its cultural diplomacy has had an impact on public diplomacy.

The fashion industry influences French public diplomacy in several ways, contributing to the country's diplomatic objectives and enhancing its image and influence on the global stage. French fashion serves as a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy. In this way, the transmission of French culture abroad became an important part of French diplomacy and business. It is good that people outside France, foreigners, have come to know France through the brand, and it shows how influential the brand is (Frans & Aryani, 2020). Through fashion, France showcases its cultural heritage, artistic tradition, and national identity. By promoting French fashion globally, the industry fosters cross-cultural understanding, appreciation, and dialogue, contributing to the cultural diplomacy efforts of the French government. When a foreigner talks about France, they might mention a romantic, fashionable and elegant city. The link between fashion and soft power will therefore be essential and enduring (Frans & Aryani, 2020).

French social and cultural life, and fashion as a form of soft power, help spread France's influence, and even its influence on the French economy (Frans & Aryani, 2020). Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. French fashion, with its reputation for elegance, sophistication, and innovation, exerts a strong influence on global fashion trends. The popularity and desirability of French fashion brands and designs enhance France's soft power by projecting an image of cultural excellence, artistic sophistication, and fashion leadership.

The French fashion also need to plays a crucial role in shaping and projecting the image of France globally. French fashion embodies the values and aesthetics associated with the country, such as elegance, style, and luxury. Through fashion, France reinforces its brand as a center of fashion, creativity, and cultural excellence. The industry contributes to shaping positive perceptions of France, reinforcing its reputation and enhancing its overall nation brand. The French fashion industry often appoints fashion ambassadors or cultural ambassadors who act as representatives of French fashion on the international stage. These ambassadors, including designers, models, and industry professionals, promote French fashion, engage in cultural exchanges, and contribute to public diplomacy efforts. They participate in international events, collaborations, and initiatives that foster cultural understanding and diplomatic relations.

In a fashion events, such as Paris Fashion Week, provide opportunities for fashion diplomacy. These events attract international designers, industry professionals, media, and influencers, creating platforms for diplomatic engagement and cultural exchange. The French government leverages these events to strengthen diplomatic ties, forge international partnerships, and showcase the talent and diversity of the French fashion industry. Diplomats and foreign dignitaries attending these events promote dialogue, collaboration, and mutual understanding. By this thing, economic impact contributes to French public diplomacy. The industry generates employment, drives exports, and attracts foreign investment. The success of French fashion brands and designers fosters trade relations with other countries. The French government strategically utilizes the economic influence of the fashion industry to strengthen diplomatic ties, negotiate trade agreements, and position France as a global hub for fashion and trade.

## **CONCLUSION**

The fashion industry wields a significant influence on French public diplomacy. Through its cultural diplomacy efforts, the fashion industry showcases France's rich heritage, artistic expression, and national identity. It also serves as a tool for soft power projection. The industry contributes to France's nation branding by shaping positive perceptions of the country and projecting an image of cultural excellence. Moreover, the economic impact of the fashion industry strengthens trade relations and enhances France's position as a global fashion hub. The appointment of fashion ambassadors further promotes French fashion and contributes to public diplomacy initiatives. Collectively, these influences demonstrate how the fashion industry plays a vital role in shaping and enhancing French public diplomacy, reinforcing France's image, and strengthening its diplomatic relations on the global stage. In this case cultural diplomacy can be considered as part of public diplomacy and had an impact on it.

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