

Article

The Nonboundary of Style in Fashion Instagram: A Media Ecology Case Study on Sustainable Digital Space-Time

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Abstract

This study investigated how fashion is expressed on social media platforms from a media ecology perspective of sustainable digital space-time, as society evolves into a digital ecosystem. Media ecology concerns how the media environment transforms human experience and impacts society and culture. A theoretical review of media ecology was conducted, and the Instagram account of global fashion influencer Susanna Lau (@susiebubble) was analyzed as a case study. In total, 300 fashion-related images were collected out of 5,817 uploaded to Lau's Instagram between May 2012 and June 2019. These were analyzed—alongside their titles, content, hashtags, and commentaries—for visual phenomena conveying everyday divisions between spatiality and temporality, public and private, real and virtual, and geography and culture, which demonstrate ambiguous boundaries. The analysis revealed that the images reflect nuances of digital time and space as they emerge in social media, and represent a nonboundary of style across the binaries of work and leisure, public and private, real and virtual, and geography and culture—signifying a sustainable digital lifestyle. These findings illustrate how our changing daily lives are visualized through fashion on a sustainable digital platform, and suggest ongoing research into the practical impact of technological advances on fashion.

Keywords: digital space-time; fashion Instagram; media ecology; nonboundary of style; social media

1. Introduction

The Internet and digital technology have formed a cyberspace that transcends the limitations of physical space and time. The everyday life of people today is rapidly changing into a mobile-based digital paradigm, with the contents of daily life reflected in cyberspace in various ways. In particular, the social media platform Instagram is receiving notable attention as a typical digital media space, which visualizes the changing aspects of everyday life in the digital media environment. Becker [1] points out that Instagram serves as an image-maker, which expands the horizons of influence for individuals; he discusses the importance of the essence of image production in such new media, as well as the possibility of platforms that may affect the global public's perceptions. Meanwhile, Kang [2] emphasizes the influence of Instagram as a new space in which people today establish their identities. Social media is not a space in which users actually exist, but rather one that encourages individuals to present, or stage, their identity in various ways, which tend to involve social norms and knowledge.

Because blogs and Instagram accounts, which started out as private domains, began to attract many followers, they expanded into the public domain and intensified their impact on different fields. About 10 years have passed since fashion blogging began in the mid-2000s, and bloggers have rapidly emerged as the new mainstream influencers of fashion. Mediakix, an influencer marketing agency and market research firm, forecasts that the market size of Instagram influencer marketing will reach USD 2.3 billion by 2020 [3]. Moreover, *Time* magazine classified the most influential people

online by their number of social media followers into mega, macro, micro, and nano influencers, and rated the influence of each group [4]. Instagram, which has recently become the main sphere of activity for global influencers, is used actively in the fashion industry as a typical social media platform, which depicts various lifestyles of the digital era via visual images. Luis, Ana-Isabel, and Ubaldo [5] discussed the critical influence of the rise of Instagram as the fastest-growing social network, and its subsequent incorporation into the communication strategies of beauty and fashion brands. Wang, Ahmed, Deng, and Wang [6] examined the overall performance achievement of social media marketing, even in Bangladesh. Shen and Garza [7] also emphasized the marketing impact of fashion influencers' content as a digital artifact, to develop digital marketing tools for sustainability.

This study focused on the online media environment characterized by a new sustainable space-time structure, which means flexible, timeless, and transcendental space, offering open connectivity across geographic boundaries in this study, such as Instagram, and approached it from the perspective of media ecology. Media ecology is a field of study concerned with the ways in which the media environment expands and transforms the dimensions of human experience and impacts society and culture [8–12]. Mattoni [13] found that media ecology and media practice approaches are suitable for a situated understanding of digital technologies on social movements, especially on social media. The open network provided by the Internet is a media environment that has recently demonstrated the biggest impact on human life; therefore, studies have been conducted consistently on this topic. However, using a media ecological perspective, which situates the media as an environment in which humans live, suggests that there is insufficient empirical research on social media, fashion, and lifestyle. Responding to this gap, this paper examines the digital space-time characteristics and daily style evident in fashion images, through a case study of Susanna Lau's Instagram account, “@susiebubble,” because Instagram is a platform in which global fashion influencers are actively engaged.

Lau was born in the United Kingdom. She is of Chinese descent and her family comes from Hong Kong. She began as a non-professional fashion blogger in 2006, when personal blogs started out as a digital platform for portraying personal life. Today, she is famous as a world-renowned fashion influencer with delightful prose and a unique fashion sense [14–15]. She communicates her personal style via fashion images, working as a professional creator who collaborates with multiple brands in different ways [16–18]. When the Telegraph, a British market research agency, focused on bloggers as newly emerging powerful players in the fashion market in 2010, they introduced Lau as one of the best British fashion bloggers [19]. Today, Lau remains the most influential fashion blogger and influencer, globally.

This study focused on the space-time characteristics of social media, which has become a major channel of communication in daily life in the digital media environment, setting up the following research questions to examine the effects of our changing space-time experiences on fashion. First, this study theorized new space-time characteristics of the digital media era based on the concept of media ecology. Second, it examined how the digital space-time characteristics of social media platforms are reflected in fashion through the case study of Lau's fashion Instagram. Third, it analyzed the meanings conveyed by fashion images on Instagram, situating them as key representations of the changing aspects of everyday life.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Media ecology

Media ecology was first proposed by Neil Postman in 1968, as a term to indicate the study of media as an environment, and has been shared and developed as an academic view among various scholars, such as Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, Harold A. Innis, Lewis Mumford, and Walter J. Ong [11,20]. Their main interests include “what impact communication media have on human perception, understanding, emotion and value; how interaction with the media promotes or disturbs our survival opportunities; and the effects on media structure, content and people as a media environment in the ecological aspect” [12] (para. 4). In other words, media ecology studies “the

changing process of the communication method and system in which culture is produced and shared"; "styles/forms of technology and information"; or "the process in which communication codes, etc. form the human society" [21] (para. 1–3).

Ong raised the question of media ecology by mentioning "ecological concern," a view that expresses "a new state of consciousness, the ultimate in open-system awareness" [22] (p. 324). Ecological concern is the key media research approach developed by McLuhan, the scholar who famously claimed that "The medium is the message" [23] (para. 1) and who emphasized that the content of the completely new environment of the Electric Age comes from the mechanization that began in and has developed since the Industrial Age [24]. Moreover, McLuhan [25] argues that, just as fish live in the water, the media is the environment and medium in which individuals live. This environment is the site that creates and develops new technologies, from writing to television, and from wheels to planes [11]. In this study, media ecology refers to the mutually formative arrangement of various media. This is an ecological characteristic in which new media always make up for and/or replaces old media rather than excluding it; thus, the relations between media in this landscape thereby evolve into the most efficient state [25–26]. Inspired by McLuhan, Postman officially introduced the term "media ecology" at the annual conference of the National Council of English Teachers in 1968; the term was first published in "The Reformed English Curriculum" in 1970 [10] (para. 161).

Ong proposes an "open-system awareness" that improves the process of originality, freedom, and exploration and discovery in media [22] (p. 324). According to Strate [12], the "hypertext" style of medium, of which the Internet is one example, refers to an open network without boundaries that provides network ideas as well as private and public publications; in addition, it enables us to follow network links in multiple directions. Moreover, Postman [27] raises the issue of the way in which interactions between humans and media give a culture its characteristics and wonders about the way in which a culture maintains its symbolic balance, stressing the humanism of media ecology. The deeper point here is that McLuhan, Ong, and Postman characterize the media as an ecology, an open system involving imagination and play, and they do so with an eye for how the media may impact the future of humanity. These things are necessary in the 21st-century media environment, in which advanced and complicated information and communications technologies (ICT) dominate everyday life [12].

Lee [9] studies the online media environment, in which spatial and temporal experiences are reconstructed, from an ecological perspective. Notably, Lee argues that various senses of space are formed according to the connection and interaction between one person and another, or between people and data, facilitated by the Internet. Along these lines, Scolari [11] suggests that media ecology explores how and why the media structures what we see and think, and thus how it encourages us to perform certain roles. Taking this perspective, this study characterizes the Internet media environment with a new space-time structure based on the sense in media ecology that the media environment is one in which humans live.

2.2. *Space-time characteristics in digital media*

This section classifies the various spatial and temporal aspects of digital space-time that appear in the online media environment into four characteristics based on previous studies in media ecology: 1) flexible, timeless, and transcendental space free from the linear concept of time; 2) social space that provides connectivity, transcending geographical boundaries and open to anyone; 3) virtual space that is an extension and expansion of reality with unclear boundaries; and 4) aesthetic space in which humans are the creative subjects that capture everyday moments in unique images.

2.2.1. Transcendental space

Mumford [28] argues that the clock (that is, the mechanical equipment that controls and regulates human activities) expanded the mechanical ideology of capitalistic society. The flow of labor, which had been keeping pace with the organic rhythm of nature in Western modernity, gradually became standardized and systemized by mechanical time. This concept of mechanical time

is calculated quantitatively and can be distinguished or evaluated depending on purpose. Certainly, it is still deeply involved with the everyday life processes that we experience and organize in our lives. As people began to work according to the flow of linear time and created the rhythm of time in which we typically work and rest, a division of space emerged—for example, working spaces and resting spaces—as part of the crystallization of a modern lifestyle [9] (para. 20). Putting this into a cyber-context, it is important to note that Strate [29] presents three levels of cyberspace. The first is ontology, which includes notions of cyberspace as space-time. The second is physical, perceptual, and virtual space. The third is a synthesis, including different types of cyberspace, such as media, aesthetic, data, and personal and social spaces. In the digital media environment, Internet space is a cyberspace with a new space-time concept, which diversifies the conventional experience of linear time. Laguerre [30] also claims that cybertiming and flexitiming can be experienced by destroying space-time boundaries and compressing time distance in a digitalized city. This indicates that virtual time blurs the lines between weekdays and weekends, or days and nights, in the digital space, thereby weakening the traditional cycle of labor and flexibly reconstructing linear time [9].

Strate claims that people experiment with various identities in the Internet space, where they experience a dreamlike state that is referred to as “sacred time”, in which they are not influenced by the linear time of reality [31]. We see this when Internet users choose their own communication conditions and experience “the present in which there is constant temporal dislocation and dynamic interaction away from the linear time flow of reality” [9] (para. 23). Virtual space makes infinite imagination possible and enables people to review the spatial concept of reality in the virtual space; digital time helps us overcome the limitations of analog time [32]. This capacity is rooted in the space-time characteristics of digital media, free from matter and where infinite expansion and replication are possible [33]. Therefore, the experience of time in the Internet space breaks from the concept of time being attached to a geographical place. People can communicate in real-time simultaneously, regardless of normative life rhythms based on mechanical time; communicate non-simultaneously according to their own convenience; and even restructure their working hours free from the traditional fixed time and rhythm of 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. While the lifestyle built on mechanical time distinguished the time spent inside home from the time spent outside, or break time from working time, remarkably, the digital space facilitates the mutual penetration of time and space [9]. This study examines how the non-fixed, flexible concept of time in the online media environment expresses rhythms of everyday life in Lau’s fashion Instagram, focusing on work and leisure in particular.

2.2.2. Open social space

Media ecology maintains that the Internet is an open system that intensifies originality, freedom, exploration, and discovery. This is because the hypertext media of the Internet provides users with network ideas as well as private and public publications, and also enables them to freely explore and expand their ideas by following links in multiple directions without boundaries [12],[22]. The Internet’s feature of connectivity thus enables constantly changing amorphous social relations, or what is called “liquid tribalism” in digital society, as well as according senses of space. This indicates that various network communities formed beyond geographical places or national borders on the Internet have come to achieve dynamic, simultaneous, and horizontal communication [9]. Deleuze and Guattari’s work on fluidity presents the concept of smooth and striated space [34]. This space is tactile, something one can touch and see, as well as a “cyclical space” of freedom and movement. In their study on the evolution of the Internet and the changing concept of space, Yun and Rho [35] claim that the online media space is a fluid space where circulation occurs freely as in Deleuze and Guattari’s smooth space, in which social relations are embodied in the form of flux regardless of any sections or areas in physical space [34] (p. 87). For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that this fluidity in the digital media space has decentralized fashion geography. While in the past there was a typical map of trendsetters, today, a “fashion blogosphere” has emerged that captures the eyes of people with no systematic cooperation in fashion, and it has already demonstrated great influence [36] (para. 159). In particular, social media platforms focused on images have become venues where not only fashion experts but also nonprofessionals all over the world can express their

unique fashion styles and tastes. Furthermore, the line between professionals and amateurs has been blurred by the growing social network and influence of social media users, such as fashion bloggers and Instagrammers, which has led this group to enter the mainstream fashion system as fashion influencers. The production and sharing of fashion images in the digital space-time of social media platforms have a ripple effect: images are spread infinitely through the hyperconnected network. Research on mobile social network services has investigated the sustainable spread of fashion information, providing strategic guidance for more effective diffusion of fashion information [37].

Also helpful for this study is Shapiro's (as cited in [9]) argument that communication technology changed the traditional boundaries of family and the concept of privacy in the 17th and 18th centuries. Certainly, the development of communication media such as radios, televisions, and the Internet enabled the individual enjoyment of various lifestyles from the comfort of one's own home. However, the online media environment, in which interactions can be made, breaks down the traditional sense of a home space and, with it, the boundaries of family. This is because, as an open communication space, the Internet can no longer easily divide into public and private space. Recently, everyday life elements such as fashion, food, and childcare are receiving attention as the key materials of media use. Kang [2] uses the example of "eatstagram that broadcasts the personal act of eating through the private media of a mobile camera," claiming that the product of broadcasting on eatstagram "leads to the public space of social media platform beyond the private domain" [2] (p. 26). Various changes have occurred to the rhythm of everyday life with the coexistence of personal life offline and social life online through the digital platform. Strate [29] also claims that the online media space is at once a highly personal and highly social space. Along these lines, Internet cyberspace is "a data space as well as a personal space to present oneself, and at the same time a social space for one-on-one or group conversations, and even a space of actual social or parasocial relationships depending on interactions." Here, it is helpful to note that "parasocial relationships" refer to the imaginary relationships in which one person knows about another person very well, but this other person does not know the first person. Typical examples include relationships between celebrities and fans, or between influencers and followers on social media [9] (para. 17–18).

Digital social media platforms echo the more general online media environment's constitution as an open space accessible to anyone, transcending geographical boundaries. In particular, Instagram expands social relations in everyday life by enabling users to share images on its mobile platform [38]. Taking up this platform, this study focused on how Lau's fashion Instagram expresses geographical spatiality in its fashion images.

2.2.3. Realistic virtual space

Transformations in the concept of space are evident in the ways in which the media constantly evolves alongside and interferes with human communication. Today, this is apparent in the focus of discussions that binarize reality and virtuality on the expansion of social space through the daily intervention of online space [35]. Many researchers claim that the boundary between reality and virtuality is unclear in the digital media environment, and that virtual reality will serve as space-time, displaying great potential for expanding and transcending reality. Boom (as cited in [39]) argues that digital information and images present a completely new perspective on time and space, and claimed that humans can freely cross the line between time and space through digital media and create a new reality. The primary basis of arguments about the possibility of digital virtual reality is the immateriality of digital images that belong to the 0-dimensional space and that modify time away from realistic time and space [39] (p. 14). Moreover, according to Couchot (as cited in [39]), images and worlds can be created infinitely by algorithmic changes, because the existence of virtuality in digital images is based not on realistic restrictions but on a mathematical simulation system. Therefore, digital virtual images can be expressed beyond the limitations of reality and can transcend time and space in virtual reality [39] (p. 16). Levy (as cited in [39]) also claims that the logic of virtualization, brought on by digital media, enables an exodus to a new possibility, not a fictional imagining of or removal from the real world. In other words, digital media enables the creation of a new order away from that of reality, which is systemized in a certain way or answerable to a routinely

formed method of perception. For example, today's digital media hypertext transcends conventional spatiality and forms a deterritorialized ("*déterritorialisé*") space. Levy argues that this deterritorialized virtual reality will gradually replace the extant real world and thus leave virtual space; this will bring more abundant potential to reality [40] (p. 26).

In *La production de l'espace*, Lefebvre [41] points out that space is not just a physical arrangement of objects but a concept that includes the social behavior of humans, spatial layout of everyday life, social and spatial imagination, and prospects for humans in a historical space, concluding that the system of space works in all aspects instead of being limited in scale and level. The concept of virtual space also tends to exclusively possess the concept of real space—set as elements included in social space-time, such as notion, representation, and language—enabling infinite territory to be produced and expanded by technology. The creation of virtual space in the digital media environment ultimately originates from the human consciousness and mimesis, forming a more familiar and realistic space. It can thus overcome the limitations of reality, turning imagination into reality by creating a virtual reality that imitates a real space [42] (para. 83). Digital spaces such as Instagram are places in which people can share their realities and communicate with others by crossing time and space; at the same time, they serve as venues for users to display their own virtual personalities and actualize creative egos beyond the limitations of reality. Taking these ideas into consideration, this study examines how Lau's fashion Instagram suggests that online media spaces enable the virtual expansion and transcendence of reality.

2.2.4. Aesthetic space in everyday life

Because the trend of visualization stands out in the cultural styles of modernity, it is important to stress the concept of visual literacy; that is, the ability to perceive, analyze, evaluate, and produce visual messages [43]. Visual literacy indicates a set of abilities and trained skills for actively and creatively consuming and producing images using visual media; ultimately, it makes visual communication possible by enabling visual thinking, reading, and writing [44–45].

Gillian (as cited in [2]) states that, as visual literacy in and for digital media develops, images on social media produced by the public function as a means to visualize everyday modern life, while at the same time establishing a venue for public cultural practices. Here, it is helpful to note that the paradigm of visualization of everyday life situates images as a visual phenomenon. According to Gillian (as cited in [2]), calling an image a visual phenomenon indicates that images show contemporary subjects "ways of looking" at the world under certain sociocultural conditions [2] (p. 11). In particular, Instagram demonstrates the cultural trait of promoting a style of social visual communication, in which meanings are exchanged through images [38]. Casual visual records of daily life have become more popular with the integration of mobile cameras, the Internet, and social media [2]. The first Instagram image was a picture of a dog, taken by chance by co-founder Kevin Systrom near a taco stand—when posted, this image captured, recorded, and shared a natural moment from everyday life [46]. Since Systrom's post, Instagram has become a popular medium for recording the everyday in real-time images.

In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (*La vie quotidienne dans le monde modern*), Lefebvre emphasizes the importance of "cultural revolution that brings out creative activities and incomplete works in ordinary and routine everyday life" [47] (p. 61). In today's digital paradigm, many people use social platforms such as Instagram as visual spaces to compose collections of everyday moments. Along these lines, Instagram, like many typical cyber-media spaces, functions as a private space such as a diary, in which people can record their everyday life in visual images and videos, regardless of time and place, as well as a public space that expands social connectivity by facilitating communication. Strate [29] defines the cyber-media space as a data, personal, social, and aesthetic space characterized by variability. Instagram fashion influencers demonstrate that social media can enable users to engage their personal space to express themselves through the visual medium of fashion. Moreover, as users form an independent identity about fashion and lifestyle, their influences grow and expand into the social space, a phenomenon that seems to result from the everyday use and aesthetic spatiality of social media as digital space-time. This study thus situated fashion Instagram as an

aesthetic space of everyday life where influencers act as creative subjects in this virtual space, express their individualities and tastes, and communicate beyond time and space.

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the digital media environment, which reconstruct the space-time experience from a media ecological perspective. Notably, digital space-time is characterized by transcendental space, a nonlinear and flexible concept of time; open social space, which transcends geographical and cultural boundaries; virtual space, which expands and transcends reality; and aesthetic space, which creatively visualizes everyday moments from the perspective of media ecology.

Table 1. The characteristics of digital space-time from the perspective of media ecology

Media ecological perspective	The characteristics of digital space-time	
	Transcendental space	Nonlinear, flexible, temporal, and timeless time
	Open social space without boundaries	Open network, liquid tribalism, decentralization, personal and social space
	Realistic virtual space	New virtual reality on the digital platform, hyper-reality, space of creative imagination
	Aesthetic space in everyday life	Image of everyday moment, visual communication space

3. Materials and Methods

In *Visual Methodologies*, Gillian (as cited in [2]) presents the three sites in which the meanings of an image are made: “the site of production that tracks the technological and genre traditions of images, the site of image that estimates the influence of image such as meaning and construction, and the site of audience that examines by who and how images are accepted” [2] (p. 16). With its aim of determining the meaning and influence of Lau’s fashion posts on Instagram, this study treated Instagram as what Gillian called the site of image: as a popular form of social media that expresses various aspects of everyday life in the digital era in visual images, Instagram and its fashion posts are key elements that represent the changing aspects of everyday life.

Taking a media ecological perspective, this case study analyzed how the fashion posts on Lau’s Instagram reflect digital space-time characteristics; transcendental space, open social space without boundaries, realistic virtual space, and aesthetic space in everyday life. Data were collected from 5,817 images uploaded on Lau’s Instagram between May 2012 and June 2019. Five fashion experts (including designers, professors, and PhD students) reviewed fashion images reflecting digital space-time characteristics based on the research framework set up from the theoretical background, collecting 300 images, with 30–40 images from each year. In the process of collecting relevant images, images introducing designer collections, publicizing events, and featuring products or places without Lau herself were excluded. When many similar images on the same topic were selected, the one most representative of that topic was selected. These 300 images were then subjected to an integrated secondary assessment, which reviewed their images, content, hashtags, and comments in conversation, based on the detailed context of the analytical framework (Table 1): nonlinear, flexible, temporal and timeless time; open network, liquid tribalism, and decentralization; personal and social space; new virtual reality on the digital platform, hyper-reality, space of creative imagination; and images of everyday moment and visual communication space. Subsequently, the 60 images that most clearly exhibited digital space-time characteristics were selected. These digital space-time

characteristics were classified by their semantic similarities into the following categories: nonboundary of work and leisure, nonboundary of the public and private, nonboundary of reality and virtuality, and nonboundary of different cultural tastes (Table 2). In this study, the term “nonboundary” refers to the ambiguity of dichotomous boundaries or distinctions in a particular area.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Nonboundary of work and leisure

Several trends have emerged with the advancement of digital society, including the division and convergence of the physical world and cyberspace; the blurring of the lines between the public and private domains; the destruction of the space-time cycle of labor and rest, which was normalized in industrial society; and the convergence of everyday life, visualized in multiple ways. ICT is gradually positioning itself as a daily technology that defines and dominates everyday life [48]. In digital space-time, dynamic interactions continue in the present, and the boundaries between weekdays and weekends, day and night, and work and leisure become unclear—time develops a transcendental character, and mutual penetration occurs between different times and spaces.

This nonboundary of work and leisure is evident in Lau’s Instagram account, in which fashion images are depicted as playful everydayness. Figure 1 portrays Lau relaxing at a hotel in the trendy Soho area of New York City—a scene of apparent leisure; however, Lau is staying at the Soho Grand Hotel for work, attending the revealing of the New York Collection. The way she is lying on the bed in a Marques Almeida dress with a MacBook at hand, mentioning Nutella cookies in the hashtags and comments, all situate this scene as blurring the lines between work and rest [49]. The hotel room, generally regarded as a space of leisure, is here also a space for work—the scene may suggest that Lau is enjoying some relaxing personal time after viewing the collection, but the image evidences the extension of work into the personal: she is using this scene of apparent leisure to publicize Almeida, Apple, and Nutella. Because many influencers post about their global business trips to fashion weeks and photo shoots, such posts of hotels, their surroundings, and fashion, which seem leisurely at first glance, are common—on the Instagram accounts of fashion influencers, there is thus no longer a distinction between work and leisure. Figure 2 shows Lau wearing a unique face-print swimsuit and cap by the pool, reading a fashion magazine and taking a selfie. However, this image is staged to advertise the cap, a collaboration by *System Magazine* and System with Creatures of the Wind, as well as the British denim brand Such A Fan, which designs face illustrations on their signature items [50]. Later, in Figure 3, Lau presents herself in the Mediterranean, traveling near Athens, Greece [51]. The summer resort look she sports, along with the beautiful vacation spot, is a great inspiration for her followers. It is unclear whether the image itself is a vacation or a work-related photo shoot. Figure 3 thus expresses a playful dailiness that collapses the boundaries of work and leisure; the image situates fashion as a lifestyle.

Next, Figure 4 features Lau on the phone at a bus stop, while Figure 5 shows her working at a café with a laptop. These images indicate both the destruction and expansion of the boundaries of the industrial era’s typical working hours and spaces, such as an office; here, work and everyday life meld together. In Figure 4, Lau talks about how she works online as she moves from one place to another during the Paris collections, a message made primary by the fact that the vintage style she presents here received much attention [52]. The caption of Figure 5 details that Lau is typing at the Grain Café, suggesting that she is working instead of relaxing at the café. Moreover, the image’s hashtags suggest that Lau is advertising the Hogan sneakers she wears in the image [53]. The deeper point here is that these fashion images evidence the ways in which labor in the digital era—no longer answerable to the industrial era’s limitations of time and space—saturates everyday life. Accordingly, the fashion images on Lau’s Instagram depict the blurred line between work and leisure, reflecting the transcendental characteristic of digital space-time. Furthermore, Lau portrays this lifestyle, in which work and play coexist beyond the norms of linear time and industrial space, as being characterized by playful dailiness.

4.2 Nonboundary of the public and private domains

Elements standard to everyday life—such as food, fashion, and childcare—have become the key foci of media today. To be sure, the public engages with these elements in media with different motivations and processes from how it uses media to share and reproduce representations of social issues, such as those related to politics or economics. Because “social media has media characteristics that cross the private and public domain at the same time,” posted images are necessarily complex [2] (para. 8). Social media platforms can collapse the social into the individual and the public into the private. While social networking sites (or “SNS”) situate these technologies as social networks, they really involve spatial structures in which users form social networks by broadcasting their *private* lives; that is, the social emerges in SNS strictly from personal territory [54]. Along these lines, most bloggers first expressed themselves online in extremely private spaces, such as their bedrooms, when they first began blogging, although, as they grew into influencers with many followers, their settings—as well as the scope of their social activities—broadened. Here, social media provided the opportunity for the private space of home to expand into public space.

Our case study reveals the digital space-time characteristics of this collapse of the private and public: Lau has constantly shared her everyday life ever since she began blogging, and has thus revealed many personal aspects of her life—such as dating, marriage, and childbirth—in her fashion posts. For example, Figure 6 shows Lau’s afternoon life and presents a discussion of the hardships of childcare as a working mother, who takes frequent business trips and is subject to an unpredictable schedule. Here, Lau has just picked up her child from the nursery and is feeding her while getting ready to go out to a dinner party. She claims that she risks getting her clothes dirty, constantly fixes her makeup in between motherly duties, and always keeps her shoes ready by her side (which made the word “shoes” familiar to her daughter, Niko, who had only just started to speak) [55]. Lau, as a mother feeding her child so sweetly in the kitchen, presents a private moment in the extremely private domain of her home; however, the image also presents a Chanel dress and high heels, which recall Lau’s work in the public domain—she is set to shortly attend the Serpentine summer party.

Figure 7 shows Lau’s family spending Christmas Eve together [56]. This takes place in the sophisticated dining space that frequently appears on her Instagram; she is sharing her private experiences with her husband and child, in the private space of her home, with the public through this fashion image of her family’s Christmas look. Next, Figure 8 shows Lau and Niko playing in their front yard; the hashtags reveal that she is publicizing her Chanel dress and the party props of MeriMeriparty [57]. Lau and Niko are wearing cheerful, lovely dresses and enjoying mother–daughter play time in their private domain; however, the post is also being used to publicly advertise fashion products. These spatial characteristics on Lau’s Instagram express the ambiguous boundary between the private and public domains. Along these same lines, Figure 9 features Lau and Niko attending Prada Mode Hong Kong together. Prada Mode hosted a unique project, which invited various artists to the Art Basel Hong Kong event, where Lau introduced “Dolls House,” a photo-installation by Jamie Diamond on the topic of the mother–child relationship, and talked about her experiences of motherhood [58]. Lau’s introduction justifies her attendance at this public brand event with her daughter, to which she was invited as an influencer, and exemplifies the transfer of the strictly private domain of motherhood into the public domain.

Last, Figure 10 features a scene in which Lau and her close friend and colleague, global fashion influencer Bryan Gray Yambao, appear to be having a pajama party at a house in Sweden. Lau has often posted images that show off her close friendship with Yambao, who is also active on Instagram (@Bryanboycom), at all kinds of events including Fashion Week. The caption details that Lau and Yambao staged the pajama party scene to disclose a list of Christmas presents available from the famous online designer shopping mall, Matches Fashion [59]. A pajama party is like a slumber party at a friend’s house, where the usually close friends spend the night together and have a lot of fun—thus, a pajama party is typically a private experience. Yet, the deeper point of the post is to promote Matches Fashion. The geometrically patterned boxes featured in the image are exclusive to Matches Fashion. Ultimately, this image represents a case of individual sociality, in which the private domain of the pajama party expands into the public domain of Christmas marketing. As such, the private and

public domains mutually and fluidly interpenetrate, demonstrating the emergence of a nonboundary of the public and private from the movement, expansion, and coexistence of these two historically binarized realms.

4.3 Nonboundary of reality and virtuality

Through digital technology, humans have become capable of creating new time and space, and there has been a growing desire for experiences in a virtual space where reality can be expanded and transcended. Furthermore, as the overall significant enhancement of visual media literacy led the public to produce a high level of media content individually, use of digital media has become more natural than ever. In the social media space, users have come to communicate with various visual images, which have created virtual realistic spaces, or resulted in the case where virtual reality is transferred into everyday life so that experience in virtual space is accepted as something superior to experience in reality [2].

Figure 11 is an image suggesting that Lau [60] collaborated with famous collage artist Kalen Hollomon and participated in Berlin Fashion Week. The way in which Kalen's fingers appear to pick up Lau and place her in the Fashion Week venue shows a virtual aspect, as well as a reality in which Lau actually attends Fashion Week. Figure 12 is an image that captures the hair of Lau [61] decorated with trendy tinsel strands, which sparkle whenever she moves her head. The hair tinsel sparkles are exaggerated and expressed virtually using digital media literacy, thereby maximizing the visual effect through the expansion of reality. In Figure 13, Lau seems to be exploring outer space, through a collage image similar to Figure 11. She appears at the Space Collection dressed in aviator jacket with a NASA logo and is holding a messenger bag of the brand, Coach. The caption reveals that she is tracking a hidden figure on a plane, and the image was inspired by the surreal collage of Steven Quinn, collage artist and street photographer [62]. This shows that Lau, as a fashion influencer, uses the artistic techniques of a contemporary artist to depict the surreal virtuality of performing a mission in outer space through digital media.

Figure 14 features a fairy-tale-like image of Lau and Niko playing in Alexandra Palace of London, in the park called Ally Pally, on a snowy day in December [63]. With a snow-covered log cabin and pine trees behind them, Lau and Niko are playing with snow, looking as though they are in a snow globe Christmas ornament. In fact, the photo was taken using a backdrop image of the snow-covered log cabin and trees. As such, the digital media expresses reality in a more ideal direction, as intended by the Instagrammers, through the effect of optical illusion, thereby giving viewers a fantasy about virtual reality as well as vicarious pleasure. Figure 15 shows Lau publicizing a perfume from Arizona launched by the American duo designer, Proenza Schouler. In the post, she describes herself as being surrounded by the sky tinged in Arizona's pinkish peach tone (which actually inspired the fragrance), mysterious rocks, and white cactus [64]. She claimed to feel as though she is "dream tripping," by which she means that her inner self is admiring the mysteriousness and beauty of an unknown world that is far from reality, expressing herself as though she were staying in virtual reality through the visual image. As such, digital social media such as Instagram enable users to expand and transcend reality, and move between reality and virtuality, thereby having the nonboundary characteristics of reality and virtuality, which are depicted as realistic virtuality through fashion images.

4.4 Nonboundary of cultural taste

Social media is an aesthetic space that visualizes various aspects of everyday life, as well as a daily space to express oneself through fashion and establish one's own style identity. This study proved that, with the daily expansion of the scope of the physical activities—and thus also of the spatial characteristics—that fashion influencers perform on Instagram, fashion images are increasingly staged in a hybrid style that exhibits a nonboundary in differences of cultural taste across various times and places. As a fashion influencer, Lau is acknowledged for her unique mix-and-match style, creating various silhouettes by boldly layering different colors and patterns. Notably,

she demonstrates a varied or global ethnic taste in her Instagram fashion posts, portraying her own unique style as she travels the world for work and leisure.

Figure 16 shows Lau at the Port Eliot Festival, an arts and culture event held every year in Cornwall, England [64]. She is posing with handmade crochet designer Katie Jones, who pursues a vintage granny look, and is wearing one of Katie’s designs. The Port Eliot Festival is an event filled with music, dancing, art, fashion, and food, and involves camping in beautiful nature. It symbolizes Lau’s lifestyle and fashion in the sense that it exhibits a convergence of cultural tastes, in which people from various fields and areas gather together to enjoy themselves. Figure 17 features Lau at a fishing village called Xingping in China, with the caption “When a cormorant fisher woman insists on re-styling you” [65]. Here, Lau is wearing a dress printed with the image of a traditional fisherwoman and a bamboo hat. The half-length puff sleeves and skirt side panel of the dress exhibit a contrast in monochromatic beige, which creates a modern silhouette. Lau also adds a casual touch to the look with black socks and sneakers. This indicates that Lau is depicting her own unique style, inspired by a fisherwoman—an expression of the re-styling highlighted in her caption.








Figure 18 is an image of Lau announcing her participation in the T-shirt project to sponsor child brides and education for girls through World Human Relief [67]. Lau donated the proceeds from the sale of a Turkish belly-dancer-influenced cone bra T-shirt, designed by Turkish fashion designer Dilara Findikoglu, who is deeply involved in women’s rights. Lau matched her T-shirt with pale pink denim for a tone-on-tone effect. Meanwhile, her hair updo—complete with a red ribbon—mixes her belly-dancer-style with a more casual, everyday look. Figure 19 is a fashion image that Lau uploaded on July 5, 2016, featuring an outfit she wore the day before [68]. She claimed to have applied the colors symbolizing the US’s Independence Day (4th of July) and France’s Bastille Day (14th of July) to her fashion. Even though she is a British woman from Hong Kong, Lau’s look here combines red, white, and blue—the symbolic colors of the UK, US, and France—to create a deconstructive style involving a dress by Jacquemus, a corset by Prada, a cape by Woolrich People, and a bag by JW Anderson. Here, it is helpful to note that deconstruction is an avant-garde fashion that creates a unique layered style by reconstructing the shape and form of clothing away from the proportions of the human body and stereotypes of beauty; in this way, Lau’s deconstructed style expresses the nonboundary of cultural taste in digital space-time.

Last, Figure 20 depicts a “back to school” feeling, set in the Akihabara area of Tokyo on August 24, 2018, just before the start of school in the first week of September [69]. The photo was taken in Taito Station, the frontrunner of arcade games in Japan and home to popular animation and cartoon souvenirs, surreal and high-tech virtual games, photo-sticker booths, and games with cash prizes—making Taito Station a popular place among many teenagers. Here, Lau is dressed in a school uniform jacket and a plaid miniskirt, resembling the dress of the teenagers in Taito Station, who come to enjoy its games. Her outfit also involves a touch of Lau’s layering style, along with a bubble hairstyle, unique glasses, and ugly sneakers that yield a typical yet trendy school look. Here, Lau uses Instagram as a deterritorialized site of digital space-time to express her absorption and retooling of the sartorial and ideological norms of various cultures in fashion, beyond national borders. Sharing her mélange of cultural tastes with many people on Instagram, Lau’s nonboundary look has expanded into a meaningful trend.

Table 2. The characteristics of digital space-time and the nonboundary of style in Lau’s fashion Instagram

The characteristics of digital space-time	The nonboundary of style in Lau’s fashion Instagram
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<p>The ambiguity of the boundary between work and leisure</p>	<div><p>Figure 1. Soho Grand Hotel [49]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 2. 15 mins of poolside [50]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 3. The perfect Greek sentiment [51]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 4. Working out of le bus stop [52]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 5. Tapping away at grain store [53]</p></div>
<p>The ambiguity of the boundary between public and private</p>	<div><p>Figure 6. Babysitting and Serpentine summer party [55]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 7. Auditioning for next year's round of Christmas [56]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 8. Chanelofficial outfit Esterfied with @merimeriparty [57]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 9. Niko into @Pradamode HK [58]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 10. Xmas spirit early with @matchesfashion [59]</p></div>

<p>The ambiguity of the boundary between reality and virtuality</p>	<div><p>Figure 11. Travelling with Kalen Hollomon's hand to MBfashionweek [60]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 12. Hair tinsel magic [61]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 13. Reliving the space race [62]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 14. Alexandra Palace [63]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 15. Dream tripping [64]</p></div>
<p>The ambiguity of geographical and cultural boundaries</p>	<div><p>Figure 16. Port Eliot festival [65]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 17. When a cormorant fisher woman insists on re-styling you [66]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 18. Vive la Dilara Revolution [67]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 19. Going for 4th July colors or anticipating Bastille Day [68]</p></div> <div><p>Figure 20. Back to school feeling [69]</p></div>
<p>Note: All images reprinted from www.instagram.com/susiebubble/.</p>	

5. Conclusion

New concepts of space and time are the key foundations of the new ecosystem emerging in the digital era, which is creating a new culture and thus, ultimately, is changing our lives. Within this new world, fashion is a cultural phenomenon, constantly evolving into a system constitutive of this

new ecosystem of digital space-time. Moreover, social media platforms such as Instagram have become popular digital spaces for reconstructing our space-time experiences. Engaging with this context, this study reviewed the new space-time concept of the digital media era from the perspective of media ecology, by examining the digital space-time characteristics evident in Lau's fashion Instagram. Notably, this examination made clear that the digital media space exhibits nonboundary characteristics; that is, unclear boundaries between daily space and time, public and private domains, reality and virtuality, and geographical and cultural distinctions. Along these lines, Lau's Instagram situates the platform as an aesthetic space, in which digital space-time phenomena appear in various images. In particular, the analysis found that digital space-time characteristics appear on her Instagram with her posts' expressions of the nonboundary of work and leisure, the nonboundary of public and private domains, the nonboundary of reality and virtuality, and the nonboundary of cultural taste.

The results of this study are as follows: first, a transcendental time was evident in Lau's digital space that collapsed the boundaries between night and day, weekdays and weekends, and work and leisure, characterizing a lifestyle in which work and play coexist. Lau's Instagram thus visualizes various aspects of everyday life not answerable to the industrial norms of space-time. Notably, in doing so, Lau also portrays labor in the digital era—that is, work performed beyond the limits of industrial time and space using a computer and smartphone—as a fun part of everyday life—a form of play.

Second, the nonboundary of the private and public domains in digital space appears in Lau's Instagram with her mixing her extremely private experiences of dating, marriage, childbirth, and childcare with her public work as an influencer—on her Instagram. Along with those of several other fashion influencers, these domains fluidly and mutually interpenetrate. Moreover, Lau's posts portray cases in which public activities were carried out in private places such as the home, and private moments with family were transferred to public places, showing the personal yet social aspect of the digital space.

Third, advanced digital media literacy is used on social media to communicate with others using various visual images, which leads to the creation of a virtual realistic space or transfer of virtual reality to everyday life. Instagram also demonstrates the nonboundary between reality and virtuality; it enables the expansion and transcendence of reality, and the mutual movement between reality and virtuality, through the visual optical illusion effect of digital media. Through fashion images, this is depicted as virtual reality, giving viewers a fantasy of virtual reality as well as a vicarious pleasure.

Fourth, the deterritorialized digital space-time characteristics of social media were expanded into the aesthetic space in everyday life, expressing various individual tastes and styles between and beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. In particular, with the scope of physical activities by fashion influencers on Instagram expanding worldwide, fashion images are exhibiting a hybrid style that depicts the cultural traits of various times and places through individual tastes. With such nonboundary tastes and styles being shared with so many people on social media, they are expanding into actual fashion trends.

The objective of this study was to investigate how fashion images on Instagram reflect digital space-time characteristics from the perspective of media ecology and, accordingly, what meanings they convey. The deeper point was to determine the major lifestyle changes and style characteristics conveyed by fashion images on social media, as the everyday life of modern society evolves with the digital ecosystem. Certainly, in the digital media environment, the fashion industry must weave itself into the everyday life of consumers and, moreover, respond more sensitively to individual needs. Understanding and analyzing various aspects of everyday life and everyday modes of sartorial expression in digital platforms, such as Instagram, will therefore continue to be an important challenge for the industry. This study addressed this need by presenting a qualitative case study, which lays the groundwork for a digital paradigm of the fashion system by outlining the interaction between fashion and image-based social media, namely, Instagram. However, it faces the limitation of only focusing on one fashion mega-influencer's Instagram account. Four characteristics of the nonboundary of style were analyzed in this study, which were categorized with a focus on the typical

cases in which digital media space-time characteristics are reflected by fashion. As such, this study is unable to represent all types of fashion images depicted on Instagram. Accordingly, the results should be supplemented and expanded by further research on the Instagram accounts of major local and global influencers. Furthermore, research must be conducted from various perspectives on the lifestyle and related sartorial changes emerging with the development of digital media.

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