

## THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF UNIFORMS AND THEIR COMMUNICATION POWER IN SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** Uniforms as directly or indirectly part of each our steps, in the various institutes and complexes, whose staff wear uniform. A good visual image of the garment is, next to the full communications strategy, the most important for building a corporate identity. What is the impact of a uniformed person on society and how does society accept uniforms? What is the role of uniforms? How do people who are wearing uniforms accept them and how do they project the image of the company through uniforms? What does uniform symbolise in society? From what kind of fabrics should the uniform be made? What is the correlation of clothing, fashion and uniforms?

**Keywords:** uniforms, communication, society, company, user.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Uniforms are one of the features that play an important role in recognition of the company, as with its impact on the incidence of customer feedback. They are an important part of the corporate image of a company or institution. Uniforms are as important a part of building a company profile as the graphic image of company, marketing activities and advertising in print publicity or the web site, and style of the interior and exterior design of the company.

Communication of the message of clothing has a very strong societal, social, economic and political influence. This sort of communication is a vital in the business environment as an important part of corporate visual identity. This is expressed through aesthetic norms of clothing, which are transformed through colour proportions. Care must taken with more than just colours. The silhouette is also important. Both affect the acceptability of the image among employees and, as a result, the company's image.

The functionality of fabrics and designs whose lines are tailored to the needs of the movement in different jobs is crucial for the welfare of everyday wear in various weather conditions.

The product can only be successful if it includes the right balance between fashion, trends, cultural aspects, aesthetics, ergonomics, product life, safety and price, designed with consideration of the users of uniforms, and of their image, to create a strong communication link in society.

### 2. UNIFORM AS A FUNCTIONAL PRODUCT

#### 2.1 Definition of the uniform

A uniform represents a group of interconnected combined garments worn together, which is prescribed for individual services for all members of certain groups of people. Modern uniforms used: armed forces, emergency service organizations (police, civil defence, fire and security), working organizations (care assistants, medical staff), catering and hotel complexes, and others (eg school children, prisoners). In addition to basic baseline characteristics of clothing whose primary purpose is to protect us from cold, heat, accidents and other negative influences, for example: protecting against such damage from sports, work, human and animal enemies and the physical and psychological risks (Flügel 1930)<sup>1</sup>, the role of uniform clothing is also to mark out a group of people. The significance is that a uniform is work clothing and indicates membership of a group in a social environment. This can subconsciously affect the relationship of the uniformed person with society.

#### 2.2 Fashion and dress correlated with uniforms

Many authors have analysed fashion and clothing from different angles, with uniforms mentioned peripherally or as the subject of a narrow focus. I analyze the correlation of fashion, clothing and uniforms, which again create different

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<sup>1</sup> Flügel J.C. (1930, third edition 1950), *The Psychology of Clothes*, London: The Hogarth Press in the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

levels of interaction and feelings that can be perceived in society.

In summary, M. Bernard, in his book *Fashion as Communication* clarifies the various aspects of fashion and clothing: in western capitalist societies dress confirms membership of different social and cultural groups, but also establishes personal identity. Fashion, with various combinations of clothing, allows and encourages individual choice and thus the dissemination and development of personal identity. Uniforms take superiority over the individual's personality. This is the power of communication and representation of a particular enterprise or group. The distinction of the individual within the group is seen in terms of positional codes, prescribing classes or functions within a particular service. It is still possible that an individual would stand out because of personal specifics in terms of individual identity, but uniform much reduces this.

In conclusion regarding the correlation of the individual with the uniformed group in terms of projecting the company identity, it can be said that uniform creates a group in which individuals do not stand out, instead taking on the uniformed image.

Clothing intended for individual use combines images to shape the message of the clothing designer, manufacturer, carriers and bystanders. Each adds its share to the creation and transformation of messages that are transmitted through the fashion and clothing<sup>2</sup>. To pursue the thought, the final image of the wearer is comprised of a combination of clothing affecting every individual. Therefore in choosing their image they create a uniform of freedom. This freedom of combination is limited only to the client, designer and manufacturer. The rules on wearing garments are only governed by what is prescribed as acceptable for any given period or occasion.

### 3.2 Uniform as an aesthetic and useful product

The performance of the product and its placement on the market are influenced by a variety of factors. Most of those that show the effectiveness of the product based on fashion, trends, market, cultural aspects, aesthetics and recycling, ergonomics, product life-time, safety, certification, as well as the target customer and price of the product range (Ljungberg, Edwards).<sup>3</sup>

Designing uniforms, compared with the creation of other products that appear on the free market, is partially different because the customer is known, the needs are clearly expressed. In designing the uniforms we can avoid many issues related to marketing that are typical of products that compete in the market. The active market share of uniforms can include tenders, through which the customer is looking

for the best offer for certain clothing, accessories or equipment.

In designing uniforms, fashion and trend is subordinate to function and movement. Of key importance is the good feel of the uniform. This puts a strong emphasis on ergonomics, perhaps multi-functional solutions that provide new dimensions of the garment.

We should not forget that uniform garments are worn every day. This makes it important that the fabrics have properties to withstand daily wear in various weather conditions. The functionality of the fabric must combine perfectly with the function of the design, the lines of which are tailored to the needs of movement in different jobs. Textiles, the development of which is moving towards so-called Smart materials, are made to take into account the special needs of emergency situations. They are increasingly developed with extraordinary properties related to the integration of uniformed clothes.

### 2.4 An example of functional uniform design

Multi-functional systems clothes are garments that allow the so-called 'onion' way of wearing clothes according to weather conditions. They are used in modern types of uniforms, including, for example, the clothing made in the context of corporate fashion design for the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Slovenia (production company Uni & Forma, design: Studio design by Sonja Sterman). Garments can be worn in different combinations, alone or in layers according to functional needs. Each of the models offers the best balance between functionality, comfort and durability, due to excellent functional fabrics, manufacturing technology and design.



Fig. 1. Multifunctional wind jacket

<sup>2</sup> Summarized after M. Bernard, *Fashion as communication*, page 29

<sup>3</sup> Lennart Y. Ljungberg, Kevin L. Edwards, 2003, *Design, materials selection and marketing of successful products*. Department of Engineering Science, University of Skövde, Sweden

The clothing image consists of work and representative uniform. In addition to providing functionality and comfort, the main objective of the choice of materials was to offer very high durability and provide additional features. The combined models give several different options of wearing, and high quality materials have increased durability and reduced the number of necessary items, which reduced the cost of manufacturing.



Fig. 2. Wind stopper

Key importance of wind jacket (Figure 1) is that it is impermeable to rain. It includes a hood, which can be removed from the collar if necessary and has a warm removable lining. This gives the model a valuable "all season" usability. The wind jacket (Figure 2) is made from fabric that is wind proof. The trousers (Figure 3) are made from fabric that has exceptional strength characteristics. The polo shirts and shirts are made of fabric to prevent sweating. Functional details also facilitate the use of additional equipment, such as loops for a belt (Figure 3). Another element of functionality allows for the attachment of badges or insignia, such as epaulettes (Figures 5 and 6).



Fig. 3. Work trousers



Fig. 4. Work jacket, detail in the waist

### 3. UNIFORM AS COMMUNICATION

#### 3.1 Uniform as symbolic communication

Symbolic communication, as it is expressed through uniforms has three themes: first, civilian uniforms as a result of a dynamic social process; second, exploring the mechanism of communication pertaining to the complex process of perception and purpose of the uniforms; and third, a discussion of the various forms of symbolic uniforms.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Wolter, Gundula, Die zivile Uniform als symbolische Kommunikation: Kleidung zwischen Repräsentation, Imagination und Konsumption in Europa vom 18. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert [Civilian Uniforms as Symbolic Communication: Sartorial Representation, Imagination, and..., Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture, 12/3, page 406

The first theme refers to the understanding of a real context and explanations relating to state and administrative uniforms as a symbol of hierarchical and political exchanges throughout history.

The second theme takes the civil uniform as a symbol of political power, social differences and cultural organizations of the world. This part of the discussion focused on the contradictory perception of civil uniforms as a symbol of power.

In the third discussion, we can concentrate on the perception of uniform clothing from several angles, as presented in the book *Imagination: Uniforms like a dream and illusion*, which emphasize a sense of uniforms as a performance under the title "Facade Dresses. About the Architecture of the Uniformed Body. Armament and Disarmament, and real-time."<sup>5</sup> Artists provide their own uniforms and raise questions of the correlation of uniforms with desire, fetishism, and textile constructions of fashion identity.

### 3.2 Types of communication of information through uniforms

Clothes are the communication link with the company. "The protection, camouflage, decency or obscenities are all ways of communicating a position in the cultural and social organization, so other members of this organization and also those outside them."<sup>6</sup> Some uses of apparel, such as communication of function, apply to all garments, including uniforms. Others do not. One of examples of this kind of communication is individuality. Uniforms do not communicate a message of individuality, but one of group identity.

Other communication implications of uniform that should be mentioned include the social value or status of the wearer demonstrated by their uniform. They not only belong to the group or service their uniform denotes, but also the class or position the person occupies within the uniformed group.

It also clear that uniform clothing shows social roles. Author M. Bernard writes: "The clothing and fashion can be used to indicate or define social roles that people have. They may be a sign that a person performs a certain role and so that it is highly unlikely that it will behave in a corresponding manner. There are claims that the different clothes and different types of clothes as they are worn by different people ensure that social interaction takes place more smoothly than would otherwise occur. For example the clothes worn by hospital doctors, porters, visitors and patients proclaim the role of

people who wear them. It is necessary to know a person's role in order to behave properly towards them."<sup>7</sup>

This use of uniform as communication can also be seen in terms of power or economic status. For example, police officers' and nurses' clothing. These uniforms tell us what kind of services we can expect from the people wearing them. "uniforms, to the extent that they suggest economic value or status, show what kind of services, as opposed to applications, we should expect from an individual. About this aspect of fashion and clothing, we can say that it indicates the economic or contractual party decoration, as opposed to the social or cultural site. We can see this on many levels. In addition, dress at least in part describes what services we should expect from these people and you can also indicate what type of service is provided."<sup>8</sup>

Modes of clothing allow you to harness the political power of uniforms, as previously also taken advantage of by Napoleon, who "re-introduced the kind of clothes that were symbols of the old regime to support the legitimacy of his empire"<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3 Influence of style and colour of uniform on perception of people in authority

The influence of uniformed people on the society had already been made the subject of a lot of research. Research as put forward by Richard R. M.S. and Johnson shows that, for example, police and military uniforms reflect power and authority. So they have a strong influence on how people accept each other. Thus, a police uniform has a thorough psychological impact on people, despite the fact that the opinion could be influenced by variations in the style of uniforms<sup>10</sup>. Different variants of the uniforms may have slightly modified the relationship of citizens to viewing and responding to uniforms. Early social interactions with clothing have a psychological impact on people's perceptions. The authors of the research find that clothing has a very strong influence in shaping the first perceived impression of a person as a single personality.

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<sup>5</sup> Wolter, Gundula, Die zivile Uniform als symbolische Kommunikation: Kleidung zwischen Repräsentation, Imagination und Konsumtion in Europa vom 18. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert [Civilian Uniforms as Symbolic Communication: Sartorial Representation, Imagination, and...], Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture, 12/3, page 409

<sup>6</sup> M. Bernard, Fashion as communication, page 79

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<sup>7</sup> M. Bernard, Fashion as communication, page 84

<sup>8</sup> M. Bernard, Fashion as communication, page 86

<sup>9</sup> M. Bernard, Fashion as communication, page 88

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, M.S., Richard R.: The Psychological Influence of the Police Uniform.



Fig. 5. in 6 Positioning mark

Depending on your style and colour, clothing may work differently. Taking the example of research: Police uniforms elicit emotion, the results range from pride and respect on the one hand, to fear and anger on the other. Different reactions may also influence the selected style of uniforms: the more relaxed, less authoritarian in contrast with the typical uniform of the classical uniformed paramilitary style. It can be concluded that the level of informality of the uniform has an effect on the level of perceived authority. After listing the authors of the paper is the study carried out paramilitary style uniforms to act more openly than classical jacket (*blaser*) style, showed willingness to help and competency.

Even clothing colour influences our perceptions of uniformed persons. The most common colours of uniform are in the dark colour range, like black, blue, grey, green, and, more rarely, brown. Psychological test show that the perception of colour is linked to mood. In colour studies, researchers connected red with excitement and stimulation, blue is linked to safety

and comfort, black to strength and resilience<sup>11</sup>. However, you can also bring out the dark emotions of anger, hostility, dominance and aggression<sup>12</sup>.

From this we can infer how important it is to know what we want the uniform to express. Changes and updates of clothing in certain departments are strictly tied to the customer wanting to change their image and knowing exactly what they want to communicate with the clothing. The style of clothing including hats and other accessories, colour, and even the state of clothing and accessories have a strong impact on how it will affect the image of the company and how the company adopts new clothes.

#### 3.4. Designing uniforms – designing new ways of communicating the image of the subscriber

The design concept of uniforms depends on the customer's desires and requirements. Approaches and methods of decision-making are subordinated in relation to whether the customer is, for example, an institution such as police, army, guards, security guards or other law enforcement authorities. Their clothing should embody safety, functionality and other properties, depending on what service the wearer performs and the purpose of the clothing. When it comes to companies such as banks, post offices etc the clothes can project confidence and order.

The tourism sector is more relaxed and more vibrant clothing may be introduced in more varied combinations, although in this sector there are many different services, e.g. in a hotel where a team of completely different professionals carrying out very different jobs (cook, waiter, receptionist etc.) work together and therefore have a range of requirements, some similar and some very different.

In sport there is a lot of energy and vibrant, clear colours are often part of creating a sporty image. Those clubs that have managed to build a strong visual recognition have achieved this by effective communication through their uniforms. Consequently, every fan of a sports club on behalf of the identifies with the visual image of the garment and feels a connection with the colour and silhouette, details that are specific to that club. A similar association can be detected by visualization of employees in all other companies whose image is instantly recognizable.

At the national level, sports clothing often includes the creation of a subsidiary character or symbol which represents the country. This can have an effect on colours, lines, logos designs and applications. Let's look for example at the Slovenian mountain Triglav, or the always recognizable clothes with the red and white checkerboard pattern that is typical for Croatia.

<sup>11</sup> M.Luscher, I.Scott, The Luscher Color Test (New York, NY Washington Square Press 1969)

<sup>12</sup> M.Damhorst, J.Reed, Clothing Color Valeu and Facial Expression Effects on Evaluations of Female Job Applications, Social behaviour and Personality 14 (1986), 89-98

Regardless of the type of uniforms, the information that the designer gets from the subscriber is the most important. Also very significant is feedback on the presentation of prototype to demonstrate the concept, and ultimately the evaluation of the wearing of clothing that serves to inform future work. In larger institutions, a working group is responsible for such development. On a smaller scale the individual is responsible. Both of which make a link between ideas and the transmission of information to the end users. It is important to link the users to the working group and continue to the designer, and also to maintain this flow of information in reverse, regarding new image parameters (design, function, innovation).

When the flow of information is ideal, the designer captures the essence of the client's wishes. After considering all the parameters proposed, a new image that is the aesthetic conglomerate of the information given is produced. This should include the effects of fashion trends, new technological solutions in terms of fabrics and craftsmanship, and functional derivatives of the cutting pattern for the respective departments within the company. The extent to which fashion, function, and intelligent clothing are included is a question for individual services and their complex needs, and ultimately their budget.

### *3.5. Designing uniforms as art and as a design activity*

When designing clothing there is a dilemma: Is fashion an art or design activity?<sup>13</sup>

The debate offers an answer: the design of a collection of clothing, whether it's a unique model, or a mini-collection to be presented at a fashion show, a mini-based boutique selling a collection or a collection that is intended for the general population in terms of prêt à porter collection is just as much a work of art, as is the design of plumbing installation intended for exhibition, to which the usual audience response is with no doubt they are viewing a work of art. I mean, all this is an artistic activity, except that the starting point of product destination and use of product are different. In the case of a clothing design collection, the art is needed to connect with other skills. When designing a smaller collection design activities are associated with the technical skills of craft activity if there is a lower volume of clothing, or when designing the manufacturing process. In this case there are rules for how to make products on a large scale. In all of these products it is important to approach the task as a designer - an artist who respects the use of contracted works and takes into account the particular market and customer preferences. The designer, after preparing sketches and documentation, follows their design through to the production stage. The nature of this work sometimes detracts from the impression of design as an artistic process.

The difference in approaches to different art work is therefore the purpose, which affects the next steps taken. The result is that a work of art can be an innovative design, the inclusion of new lines, materials, solutions, sometimes even taking into

account a client's wish for rigid forms and materials, leaving little room for freedom or flair. This can be beneficial for a designer. This is art expressed only in certain proportions, lines, silhouettes in the form of re-arranged seams or in tiny details. This presents the same question related to uniforms. What is the creation of uniforms, when the design is even more limited by the principal of what uniforms represent? Is it art?

The designer has to decide many questions about prices and minimum quantities of materials and their deliveries. Production is far cheaper in large quantity for example. Quality and cost must be considered, and costs may be reduced by using a local supplier. Is this not also a kind of art, to take into account all the factors that affect the working conditions and work within the limits to make clothes that ultimately function by material, colour, shape, lines, dimensions, price, production process and the rest of the logistics, all the way to the stage of reordering clothes for new employees? All phases of design work combine a wide range of technical skills and co-operation with other disciplines, to bring the final product together.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Uniforms accompany us in different ways and in different contexts at every step. Clothes are correlated with fashion, which changes quickly and includes trends with many elements that are not acceptable for uniforms. Uniforms are always related to fashion, but not in the whole range of trends it offers each season. The most important new developments in fashion related to uniforms are additions to practical and functional innovations brought about by the field shape, the advantages of technological advances in the development of fabrics. Many of the fabrics which have special features were first designed for the needs of uniforms and later incorporated into fashionable clothing (waterproof fabric, fabrics that are impervious to wind, various layers of finishing fabrics against mosquitoes, sweat etc). These properties of fabrics and processes protect the body against various influences more than ever before, which has always been one of the main purposes of clothing in general.

The power of uniforms is not only in the primary, often referred to properties, to achieve function and aesthetics, but also as an extraordinary communication tool that complements the overall image of a company or institution. Corporate fashion identity is influenced by colours, patterns, silhouettes, cuts and materials that symbolize the different emotions. Uniforms may reflect discipline, orderliness, uniformity, authority, subordination and other features. The question is what uniforms are and what we want to communicate with them, what the connotation of uniforms is, what feelings can be communicated by them, and what associations and impressions are achieved?

All these elements affect the message of the uniforms, which is a strong communication link with a company that communicates both through social force and social roles, such as through the economic and political power.

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<sup>13</sup> Question summarized after M. Bernard, Fashion as communication, page 34

So if we want to function in society, in uniform, and through it the "talk", it is important that we know what we want to communicate. It follows that the starting point of creating the image is precisely defined by the customer who knows what they want to communicate. Only then can the design begin. The process has to take into account various factors. This is reflected in the final product: a communication link which effectively arouses feelings and reactions in society.

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