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How fashion brands can use concepts from Postmodernism theory to plan, create, produce, and post images on their social media channels

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Introduction

The rise of social media has changed the way people interact and behave in Politics,[1,2] the way consumers interact with brands,[3] and the way companies interact with its customers and stakeholders with a variety of marketing objectives such as branding, research, customer relationship management.[4,5] In 2021 more than 4,2 billion people will be connected through social media worldwide.[6] These hyperconnections stimulate the dynamics in contemporary society.

The postmodern theory is well suited to understanding the complexity of this contemporary, hyper-connected society. It considers that the world is in perpetual incompleteness and permanent transformation. Postmodernists promote pluralism that there are many ways of thinking and various truths to a fact, and that reality is fragmented and chaotic. They posit that the present is the only time to be analyzed and studied and that instead of looking for universal truths that can be valid to anyone, people should center their attention on the ephemerality and diversity of the moment.[7–10]

This chapter aims to present and discuss how fashion brands use some of the postmodernism ideas to communicate and interact with their customers on social media. This chapter is organized as follows: first, a theoretical background is presented, discussing the main ideas and concepts in Postmodernism, including the arguments of the most relevant authors in Postmodernism theory, followed by a case study section where the main concepts used by two fashion brands are presented to foster their communication channels in social media, by discussing how these images are connected with four ideas from Postmodernism theory. This discussion is relevant to professionals from the Marketing and Fashion industry. It helps them understand how these theories can help them plan, create, produce, and publish images consistent with the values and image they want to connect to their brand in the market.

Theoretical background: Postmodernism

When analyzing the term postmodernism, one often considers it linked with the concept of modernism from a sequential perspective. Postmodernism is indeed considered by some authors a rupture with the modern era and the conventions from the Enlightenment years. The main defining difference between modernism and Postmodernism is Postmodernism's rejection of the modernist idea that human social experience has a fundamental "real" basis. On the contrary, Postmodernism posits that social experience is an interplay of myths that produce regimes of truth.[10–13] The political position of Postmodernism is that different myths ought to be allowed since they are products of the different "realities" of communities and that each myth system ought to show respect and tolerance to the presence of others. Postmodernists, on the other hand, reject the idea of periodizing - including things on a time scale, suggesting continuum advancement

- the use of the prefix "post" in the term "postmodernism" was not a happy choice as it implies the idea that it occurred after modernism.[14]

Nevertheless, as Lyotard and Massumi[15] explain, this term indicates mood and state of mind. It signifies a change in people's interpretation of meaning, simplifying the ideas of narratives. It is a breakaway movement from the great narratives that modernism highlights as a core concept in people's interpretation of reality.

This concept of great narratives is paramount to understanding the works of one of the main intellectuals in Postmodernism. Lyotard[16] presupposes people no longer believe in the two grand narratives of science and reason since World War II. After all, logic and reason led people to construct gas chambers and atomic bombs, showing that science and reason do not take people to freedom and liberation. There was what Lyotard called disbelief in science. Not only that: when science finds paradoxes like the electron that go opposite directions simultaneously, it abandons the search for truth, and then, instead of looking for truth, science seeks ways to legitimize itself through performativity. It settles on searching for the best answer it can find, which could be considered an act of disbelief in finding the truth. This performativity leads to a series of research that only looks for a way to legitimize itself and produce results that progressively result in more of the same kind of research. Then Lyotard[16] postulates that instead of looking for great narratives, people focus on micro-narratives with stories closer to their lives, which make sense to them (and legitimize themselves). Lyotard & Massumi[15] conclude that not even Capitalism can legitimize itself in the current world as their core concept that "everyone will prosper" has lost its credibility in contemporary society.

Benhabib[17] indicates that even micronarratives should be parsimoniously analyzed. The author cites the works of Jameson about the postmodernist experience by citing the experience of staying at the Bonaventura Hotel in Los Angeles, a work of architectural art of Postmodernism. The building designed by architect John C. Portman was constructed in 1974 to lead people to expand their sensory experience and conceive their bodies differently in the space of the building. In this 35-story hotel, one notices that two floors must be included as it does not have floor numbers 7 or 13. Colors and symbols name the elevators: Red Circle, Yellow Diamond, Green Square, and Blue Triangle, and only the Red Circle goes to

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the top floor, where a revolving restaurant is located. Soja[18] classified the Bonaventura Hotel as a representation of restructured spatial in Capitalism as it is "fragmented and fragmenting, homogeneous and homogenizing, divertingly packaged yet curiously incomprehensible, seemingly open in presenting itself to view but constantly pressing to enclose, to compartmentalize, to circumscribe, to incarcerate."[18] Nevertheless, even if the concept and design of the building can lead people to experience a sensory and cognitive change while interacting in the building, neither Jameson nor Soja address if people felt this "expansion of horizons" and even if they bothered to understand the concept behind this postmodernist architecture. Maybe they should have realized the missing floors or attended the revolving restaurant, which can lead us to wonder about the comprehensiveness of Postmodernism by people.

A selection of Postmodernism ideas relevant to this discussion

Cova[19] summarized the propositions of Postmodernists in five different ideas. The first one is the distrust of universal explanations, considering the fragmentation and ambiguity of reality. They posit that they offer new concepts that would better explain how people experience and understand the world they live in. The second idea is that Postmodernists consider that society is not a connection of small groups but a network of micro-groups that act like a tribe of people with similar identification and consumer practices. These tribes reflect the complexity of individuals as they can participate in many different tribes simultaneously. The third idea is that marketing should consider consumers' uniqueness and change communication to one-to-one. The fourth idea is that consumers often prefer projecting their reality to the reality itself. They like to experience this projected reality by sharing the world's perception as they see it, disregarding reality per se. What a person posts on Instagram are more important than what s/he is seeing or feeling. Experience is more important than the product itself.

Furthermore, the last idea is the importance of image. A brand is what is implied in the images it propagates. These images help consumers build the image they have of a brand.

Firat, Dholakia & Venkatesh[20] suggested six conditions for Postmodernism:

(i) Hyperreality, grounded in consumption experiences, in the simulations experienced by consumers in theme parks such as Disney World,

(ii) Fragmentation, life experiences in contemporary society is the fragmented moments in consumption experiences and, especially, in marketing communications,

(iii) Reversals of production and consumption, where production losing its privileged status in culture and consumption becoming the means through which individuals define their self-images for themselves and to others,

(iv) Decentering of the subject, "subject" of the modernist narratives is decentered and confused with the object, where brands play as heroes in the center of the stage and the consumer is at the margin,

(v) Paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites, the ability and willingness to present different images in fragmented moments liberates the consumer from conformity to a single image, to seeking continuity and consistency among roles played throughout life,

(vi) Loss of commitment, a disillusion with the inability to experience grand or singular projects. The consumer, then, takes on multiple, sometimes even contradictory projects, to which he is marginally and shortly committed, not taking anyone too seriously.

This can be observed in every aspect of life: personal relationships, professional tasks, and consumption activities.[21] added three other conditions for Postmodernism:

(i) Readiness for living a perpetual present, a cultural propensity to experience everything, a "here and now" philosophy,

(ii) An emphasis on form and style, as opposed to content in determining meaning and life

(iii) A greater acceptance of or resignation to a state of disorder and chaos, a cultural acknowledgment that crises and disequilibria are the common states of existence.

Baudrillard[22] discussed the concept of simulacra, examining the relationships among reality, symbols, and society. Simulacra are copies portraying things that either had no original or no longer have an original. Simulation is the imitation of a real-world process over time. The author claims that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs and that people live in a simulation of reality. Moreover, these simulacra are not based on reality or hide reality. They hide that anything like reality is relevant to understanding life. The simulacra refer to the significations and symbolism of culture and media that construct perceived reality, the acquired understanding of coherent life. There are four stages in simulacra. The first is a faithful image of reality, where a sign reflects a profound reality. Then there is the perversion of reality, where pieces of evidence that the sign of being an unfaithful copy of reality is evil. A third stage unveils the absence of reality, and the sign pretends to be a faithful copy with no original. Signs and images claim to represent something real, and arbitrary images are merely suggested as things they have no relationship to. The last stage is pure simulation, in which the simulacrum has no relationship to reality. Signs merely reflect other signs. Baudrillard[22] posits that the lack of distinctions between reality and simulacra can be observed in several ways. Commercial images create a need in contemporary media, including television, film, print, and the Internet. In exchange value, the value of goods is based on money rather than the usefulness of the good. Multinational Capitalism separates produced goods from the original resources and the processes used to create them.

Firat[9] acknowledges that community is a fundamental concept for postmodernists as interests in different tribes group consumers, and these communities are conjoined, conglomerate entities of the postmodern era. The author also remembers that marketing professionals should develop a collaborative rather than a managerial mode to interact with consumers in the postmodern world. In this world, everything related to the brand goes through a process that incorporates the public view and lets consumers participate. They are no longer just a receptor of information but a producer of meanings, life experiences, identities, and values. Boundaries between the brand and the consumer no longer exist, and this new conception transforms the organizations. Communication should be redefined as it needs to be understood as the mutual construction of symbolic meaning, a partnership between the brand and the consumer.[9]

Postmodernists are often criticized for the lack of objectivity they offer to academia. They criticize several concepts and ideas without offering specific, defining answers to the issues they discuss

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and question. Still, their prepositions work with a much broader perspective than its precedent theories, accommodating the complexity of individuals and the relations they foster amongst them and with the brands. Considering the velocity of the changes have been occurring in society in the 21st century, where companies like Facebook, Uber, Netflix, and Airbnb that have been operating in the market for about a decade or less, but still reach hundreds of millions of consumers, and present revenues over a billion of dollars each, there is a clear indication that the dynamics in the society is changing. The uncertain, ambiguous, and chaotic elements presented by Postmodernism are a great fit, in theory, to cope with this phenomenon and, therefore, should be used by fashion brands to express their multi-dynamic identities.

Postmodernism in consumer culture

The field of consumer culture is rich to be analyzed by postmodernism theory due to its complexity. Featherstone[14] identified three main perspectives on consumer culture in Postmodernism:

(i)   The view that consumer culture is premised upon the expansion of capitalist production, which has given rise to a vast accumulation of material culture in the form of consumer goods,

(ii) A more sociological view, that the satisfaction derived from goods relates to their socially structured satisfaction, depending upon displaying and sustaining differences

(iii) The emotional pleasures of consumption, the dreams, and desires which become celebrated in consumer cultural imagery.

The expansion of capitalist production led to the construction of new markets where people learned to be consumers through advertising and other media.[23] Therefore, the over-supply of symbolic goods in contemporary Western societies brings cultural questions to the stage and has wider implications for conceptualizing the relationship between culture, economy, and society. A similar emphasis on the relentless logic of the commodity is found in Jean Baudrillard's work, one of the main authors of Postmodernism. Baudrillard[24] uses semiology to argue that consumption entails actively manipulating signs. This is one part of Baudrillard's definition of consumption in his book The Consumer Society.[24] Even though this work is focused on consumption, as a postmodernist intellectual, Baudrillard offered several descriptions for the term that it is not possible to compact what Baudrillard means by consumption. To Baudrillard, consumption is not merely a frenzy of buying a profusion of commodities, a function of enjoyment, an individual function, liberating of needs, fulfilling the self, affluence, or consuming objects. Consumption is an order of significations of objects, a code of signs, and an unconscious constraint on people, both from the sign and socio-economic-political systems.

Baudrillard[24] considered a social dynamic of needs a consumer may have can be classified into three groups:

(i)   Needs that are interdependent and rational where choices are imposed by persuasion,

(ii) Needs that are interdependent and are the product of a learning process

(iii) Needs that are socially controlled and reflect the cultural model within which they are made.

Aguiar[25] considers that the use and understanding of images in advertising are complex as it goes through the consumer's subjective perception. Therefore, the heterogeneous postmodernism point of view may offer relevant insights. The postmodern consumer recognizes they are not just a consumer but a customizer and a producer of images at each consumptive moment. Marketing with a postmodern perspective must no longer conceptualize any consumer unit as a point of conclusion but as a moment in the continual production cycle. Moreover, since this consumer no longer represents a centered, unified, consistent, single self-image but a fragmented and fluid set of self-images, conceptualizing the consumer as a member of a relatively homogeneous market segment is increasingly difficult.[21]

Case study: ROOM and Serpentina Brands - the use of postmodernism ideas in fashion brand campaigns

As discussed in the previous section, it is possible to expect that several concepts of Postmodernism theory can be applied in the practices of branding in social media, as these concepts are aligned with the dynamic and complex behavior consumers have in both online and offline with brands from their daily lives. Consumers search for, purchase, use, and talk about brands they like constantly changing. In an extremely interesting paper, Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman[5] described how desire is constructed through networked narratives on Instagram. This complex exchange of symbols and connections in social media is the mainstream communication for brands nowadays. This is especially true for Fashion brands, as social media is the main channel consumers and brands interact. Social media is already consumers' preferred way to interact with and discover new brands, with over 1/3 of consumers choosing it as their preferred channel to contact them (Sproutsocial, 2021).

Fashion brands need to present a coherent narrative to their customers,[26] and the use of visual images is mandatory for social media for fashion brands and the way fashion brands have used to portray their values and positioning in their fashion brand campaigns.

Two brands were selected to discuss how fashion brands use some of the Postmodernism concepts discussed in this chapter: Room and Serpentina. Both brands are new and present a strong visual identity in their products and social media channels. Also, social media is the main communication channel for both brands to communicate with their customers and the market.

ROOM is known in the market for its iconic Pillow sandal. The brand was established in 2016, and it is described in its own words as a brand to be a business built in an organic and unhurried way. Denoting the concept of house and studying the archives and values of objects and furniture, ROOM uses this aesthetic in their products[1]. Their design can be minimalist, architectural-inspired, urban, and contemporary. It produces mainly sandals but also other products such as jewelry.

Serpentina is a non-traditional beachwear brand. It is described as a brand that is "handmade and locally produced with eco-friendly polyamide. A tree is planted in a deforested area."[2]. They see themselves as a global brand. They use the "Made On Earth" concept to signal that it will be produced in places that can be handmade with social and ecological responsibilities.

ROOM and Serpentina brands use Instagram as their main communication channel. The values of their brands are transmitted exclusively by the images they produce and disseminate in their social media channels, mainly Instagram. To discuss how Fashion brands can use postmodernism concepts in their branding strategies, four postmodernist ideas were selected and paired with images that

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[1]Available at www.room-aesthetic.com
[2]Available at www.instagram.com/serpentinabikini/

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illustrate how these ideas are translated into a communication strategy that portrays the values and narratives of a fashion brand.

PostModernists ideas 1 and 2 - Baudrillard's Simulacra and Derrida's deconstruction

Ideas 1 and 2 are a mix of the concept of Baudrillard's Simulacra and Derrida's deconstruction. As mentioned in this chapter, Simulacra is the simulation of reality, a way to assess and relate to reality with products, images, or sensations that simulate what people see in real life. Derrida says deconstruction is context-relevant and may lead individuals to relate concepts from different contexts.[27] ROOM and Serpentina use these concepts to core their main products and brands.

For the ROOM brand, their main product, the Pillow sandal, has an iconic and recognizable design: a sandal that resembles a pillow made by hand in leather, which gives them an urban, sophisticated, and cozy look. It is a way to simulate the comfort of a pillow on a shoe, consistent with Simulacra. At the same time, it uses the concept of comfort from a pillow to a sandal, and the brand expects that consumers attribute the idea of comfort from the pillow to the image of the pillow in the sandal, deconstructing the concept in different contexts. Figures 1–3 below are examples of images that the ROOM brand used to highlight the design of their products, highlighting the pillow aspect in the sandal, reinforcing the new context for the comfort now in the shoes. Figure 4 is a photograph of the prototype of the design for one of the sandals, presenting in detail how the product is designed, combining different elements of reality that are translated into a product and then disseminated in an image.

Figure 1 A closer look at a Pillow Sandal by ROOM.

Figure 2 Pillow sandal on Instagram.

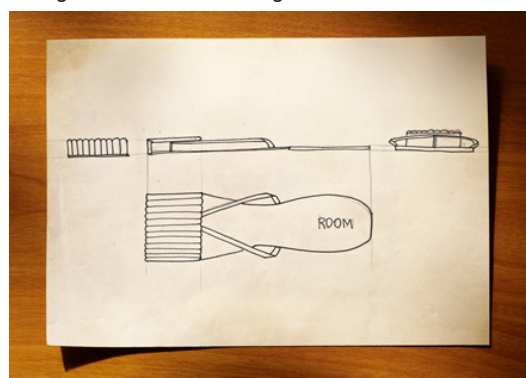**Figure 3** Image of a Pillow sandal being used.

Figure 4 Prototype of a Pillow sandal, reinforcing the design concept.

The Serpentina brand also uses simulacra. One of the main characteristics of their design is the deep green they use in their collection to celebrate the deep green of the rivers. Their choice of this specific color is the main characteristic of the design of their products, and it is a green that simulates the color that exists in Nature. Therefore, the concept of deconstruction is also present in Serpentina's communication strategy. The brand extends the use of the deep green color present in Nature in the brand's posts and products. It is usually missed, as brands and consumers tend to think about the colors of the sea, and the deep green in the rivers and lakes is often forgotten. To simulate (and celebrate) this green, Serpentina developed products using this color, as seen in the images below. Figure 5 presents the inspiration of the real world, the deep green of rivers and lakes water. Figure 6 displays how this inspiration is communicated on their Instagram page. Figure 7 shows how the green is translated into products, and Figure 8 shows how the green (the representation of the green found in Nature) is highlighted in a post from Instagram.

PostModernism idea 3 - Lyotard's Micro narratives

Micro narratives are the third idea these brands use to present their values to customers. Performativity is a key part of this concept, and in each collection, both brands find new narratives to include in their new collection. ROOM included inspiration for their iconic shoes. This inspiration can be found in hats and jackets, and they perform it to be included in their shoes, including different ways to perceive

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the use of the product. Figures 9–11 present this micro-narrative, consistent with the brand's values and reinforces its positioning.

Figure 5 Inspiration for the deep green from the rivers and lake waters.

Figure 6 Instagram post presenting the inspiration from Nature.

Figure 7 Image from a bikini using the deep green.

Figure 8 An Instagram post that highlights the use of the green.

Figure 9 Pillow sandal being used as a hat, performing a different story

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participants of their brand communities, in the messages they want to portray, reinforcing the brand's narrative and values.

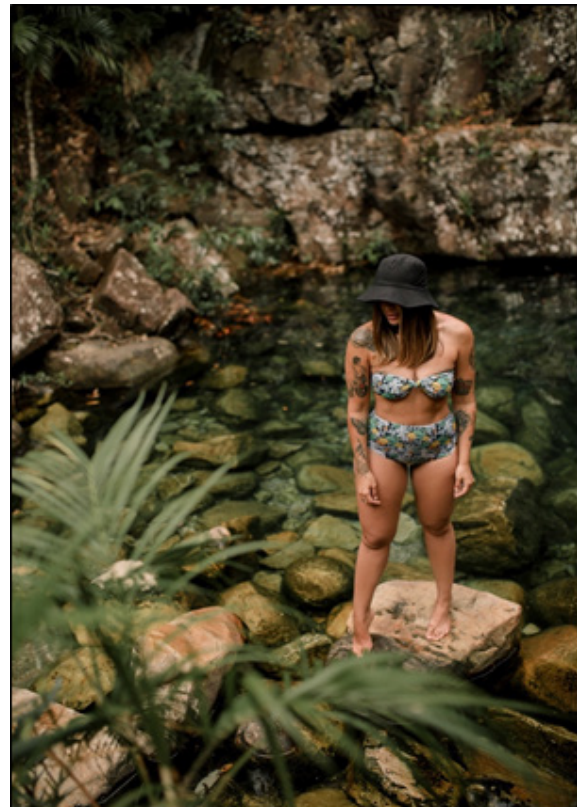**Figure 10** The inspiration for the product portrayed in a jacket.

Figure 12 The print of the product from the collection purposely seems to fade into the Nature background.

Figure 11 An image of a Pillow sandal being used regularly.

Serpentina also uses micro-narratives in each collection to reinforce their narrative of being part of Nature. Figure 12 and Figure 13 present their collection with prints of flowers in a manner that seems to vanish into the Nature background. Being persistent in the narratives of creating images where the product is symbiotic with the images of Nature reinforces the positioning of Serpentina as a brand that is truly connected to Nature.

PostModernism Idea 4 - Firat's Community concept

The fourth idea from Postmodernism in this chapter is the perception of a community as an integrative part of the brand. According to Firat,[9] brands should incorporate their customers,
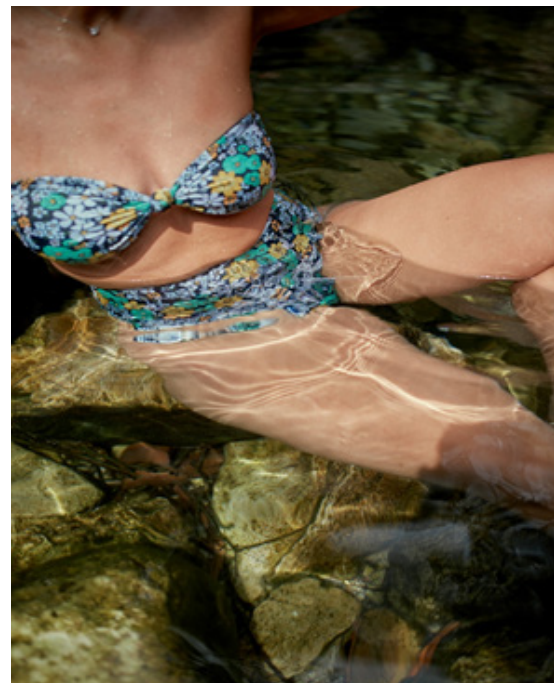

Figure 13 A closer look at the product, showcasing the print and the narrative.

Both ROOM and Serpentina invest in this kind of relationship with their customers. Figure 14 presents an Instagram post from ROOM where they repost an image posted by a consumer using their Pillow sandal. The image has elements aligned with the brand's values: the

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urban, artistic inspiration, and highlights the creative aspect of the customer that uses their products.

Figure 14 Instagram post from ROOM showcasing a customer using the Pillow sandal.

This can also be perceived in Serpentina's Instagram: Figure 15 portrays a consumer posing with a Serpentina bikini in an image that aims to represent a deep connection with Nature. This narrative is consistent with the brand's positioning.

Figure 15 Instagram post showcasing a Serpentina customer using their bikini.

Final thoughts

Simulacra, deconstruction, micronarratives, and an integrated community are four PostModernism ideas used by ROOM and Serpentina brands to present and communicate their values and create the images they want to portray in their customers' minds. These

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complex and dynamic perspectives from Postmodernism theory offer these brands elements that could be used as guidance and help them plan, create, produce, and post images and content to communicate the values they want to their customers and to construct the narratives they think are more appropriate to their presence in social media.

Simulacra is a concept that can offer fashion brands elements to elaborate and create narratives connected to their brands. To simulate what they think is relevant, the core idea of their brand is a key competence that will help brands create images and content that are deeply connected to the values they want to highlight. The idea of deconstruction helps fashion brands use different contexts and concepts, offering them a dynamic perspective on constructing their narratives with their consumers. Micro narratives are completely related to transitional collections, a characteristic that all fashion brands have to deal with in their daily routines. Using it to reinforce the brand's values in the images and content they create is fundamental to fostering the image they want to reinforce. Seeing the community members as an integrative part of their communication plan is also a concept that will help fashion brands see their relationship with their customers as more meaningful and fruitful. To identify and value the customers that are connected to the values of the brand, and highlight them to the other members of the community, integrating them into their communication resources, is a way to reinforce their values and to foster their relationship with customers that are integrated with the image they want to portray. Altogether, these three concepts inspire fashion brands to create images to communicate their values to the market and reinforce their positioning.

Credit for images used in the Figures for this article

a. Figures 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 - photographer Rogério Cavalcanti created these images, and the brands' ROOM and SERPENTINA authorized their use in this article.

b. Figures 2, 6, 8, 14, and 15 - these images are from ROOM, and SERPENTINA brands' Instagram accounts, and the brands allowed their use in this article.

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Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest exists.

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