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The White Fashion Book

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A Limited-Edition Coffee Table Book Exploring White in Fashion
Across Different Cultures

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1. Introduction

This essay positions my project within the broader cultural and historical discourses about the colour white. The project takes the form of a luxury coffee table book exploring the symbolism of this colour in fashion across different cultures. At the surface level, white may appear to be the most muted colour, associated with plainness, absence or blankness. Yet, as this project demonstrates, it is one of the most symbolically charged colours on a global scale. Its meanings span from purity and bridal innocence in the West to mourning and spiritual transition in the East, from the minimalist sophistication of contemporary luxury fashion to the sterility of uniforms and medical garments. By focusing on white, the book intends to highlight the role of fashion as a symbolic system through which societies express values, identities and traditions.

The aim of the project is twofold: first, to interrogate how white operates as a cultural signifier across diverse traditions, revealing the paradoxes and contradictions that accompany its use in fashion; second, to translate these insights into a high-end publishing format, the first of a collectible series that bridges scholarship, journalism and visual culture. In doing so, the project seeks to enrich the reader's understanding of fashion's symbolic dimensions while positioning itself within the contemporary landscape of prestige publishing.

The objectives underpinning this aim included:

- Conducting interdisciplinary research into the historical, cultural and psychological meanings of white in fashion, drawing from both primary and secondary sources.
- Developing an editorial and visual concept suitable for a luxury coffee table book, ensuring that the design reflected the subject's richness and depth.

- Situating the project within the current media and publishing industry, identifying audience profiles, competitor models as well as distribution channels and digital extension strategies.
- Reflecting critically on the process, acknowledging limitations and challenges and considering opportunities for future development.

The scope of research was intentionally broad and interdisciplinary, encompassing literature in fashion theory (Barthes, 1983; Entwistle, 2015; Craik, 2009), colour studies (Pastoureau, 2020; Batchelor, 2000), psychology of colour (Elliot & Maier, 2014; Whitfield & Wiltshire, 1990) and publishing industry analysis (McRobbie, 1998; Rocamora, 2009; McKinsey & BoF, 2024). This was supplemented by primary research (see Appendix), including interviews with practitioners, focus groups among the target audience, surveys on colour associations and visual analysis of garments, photography and advertising. Together, these methods provided a robust foundation for both critical reflection and creative production.

The structure of this essay follows six sections: Introduction, Rationale (providing the theoretical and cultural background), Research Conducted (outlining the methodologies), Contextualisation (situating the project within the media and publishing industry), Limitations (reflecting on the challenges encountered) and Conclusion, comprising a summary of findings and potential for future developments.

2. Rationale

2.1 Why Focus on White in Fashion?

As already pointed out in the Introduction, although often perceived as plain or muted, the colour white occupies a powerful and sometimes paradoxical place in fashion: on one hand, it signifies purity, simplicity and new beginnings; on the other, it has been historically linked with mourning, absence and sterility. In the Western cultures it became cemented as bridal colour during the 19th century, through Queen Victoria's choice of a white wedding gown which symbolised innocence, moral virtue and social status (Pastoureau, 2020). This decision, amplified by the media coverage, established the cultural association between white and bridal purity that still continues today in Western traditions. Yet across Asia, particularly in India, China and Japan, white is traditionally worn at funerals to embody spiritual transition and mourning (Lurie, 1992). Such contrasts outline the need of multiple lens to analyse and understand the multiple, layered and context-dependent meanings that shift across histories and geographies. This cultural dissonance makes white an ideal entry point for exploring how fashion operates as a symbolic system. As Barnard (2014) argues, clothing should be read as a text, where each aesthetic choice carries a profound cultural significance; far from being empty or basic, white is indeed a colour imbued with layered cultural and psychological associations that both reflect and challenge societal norms.

2.2 White's Cultural Paradoxes

Contrarily to one might think, white is rarely neutral; in high fashion it is frequently associated with minimalism and intellectual purity, with designers such as Jil Sander, Martin Margiela and Phoebe

Philo repeatedly employing it to embody restraint, clarity and timelessness. Particularly in Margiela's case, the frequent use of white extends to his brand identity and atelier interiors, as a means of both conceptual purity and anonymity enforcement, to efface individuality in favour of collective authorship. Conversely, working uniforms often use white to signify authority, discipline and cleanness, ranging from medical coats that project hygiene and authority, to chefs' attire and factory garments that enforce conformity (Entwistle, 2015). These examples illustrate what Eco (1976) describes as the semiotic layering of signs: colour functions both denotatively (white as absence of hue) and connotatively (white as moral and social code).

The duality of white illustrates fashion's ability to simultaneously hold multiple and even contradictory meanings. As Pastoreau (2020) observes, this ambivalence has deep historical roots: in medieval Europe, white was associated with both virtue and madness or emptiness according to the specific context; similarly, in contemporary fashion, white can be a colour of liberation on the runway, yet also one of erasure or exclusion if uncritically deployed in campaigns overlooking diversity.

2.3 Fashion as Symbolic System

Fashion operates as a symbolic system in which garments communicate values, norms and identities (Barthes, 1983). Within this system, white functions as a signifier that cannot be detached from cultural and historical frameworks. For instance, the white sari traditionally worn by widows in India signals withdrawal from social life and renunciation of worldly pleasures; in Japan, white kimonos are worn during funerary rituals to symbolise the transition to the afterlife; in the West, on the other hand, the white wedding gown represents beginnings and fertility rather than endings.

These cross-cultural case studies support Craik's (2009) claim that fashion constitutes a "social skin" mediating the relationship between individual identities and collective norms. They also demonstrate Entwistle's (2015) argument that dress must be understood as "situated bodily practice", meaning that the same garment does not carry a universal meaning but rather acquires a specific significance within the cultural, religious and social context in which it is worn. Thus, white in fashion is not a matter of aesthetic preference but rather a deeply encoded system of signs that operates differently across cultures.

2.4 White in Contemporary Fashion

The rationale for situating this project within contemporary fashion journalism lies in the continued prominence of white as both an aesthetic and symbolic choice. Especially in the branding of luxury and lifestyle sectors, it conveys minimalism, wellness, and purity, and labels such as The Row, Balenciaga and COS have repeatedly embraced all-white collections to project sophistication and intellectual clarity. At the same time, white imagery dominates visual branding within wellness culture, evoking sterility, calmness and spiritual cleansing.

Yet its use doesn't come without critique. In his book *Chromophobia*, Batchelor (2000) argues that Western cultures have historically privileged white as the absence of colour, often equating it with reason, morality and purity while marginalising other hues as "decorative" or "impure". This chromophobic tendency raises questions about power, hierarchy and exclusion in fashion: who gets to define purity and whose cultural associations of white are overlooked? By addressing these questions, this project aligns itself with current debates in fashion studies about diversity, inclusivity and decolonisation of style narratives.

2.5 Relevance to Fashion Journalism

As Rocamora (2009) notes, fashion media actively shapes cultural meaning by translating the codes of designers into narratives accessible to consumers. To focus on white is therefore to interrogate not only the colour itself but also the ways in which media and publishing frame its significance.

By producing a coffee table book dedicated to the cross-cultural symbolism of white in fashion, this project contributes to both fashion scholarship and journalism, in that it seeks to enrich the understanding of fashion's symbolic power while also responding to contemporary publishing trends that value slow, collectible and visually led storytelling. The book is therefore not merely a design object but also a journalistic intervention, opening a space for readers to engage critically with a colour too often dismissed as neutral but in fact saturated with cultural and symbolic significance - and the use of the term 'saturated' here is everything but casual.

3. Research

3.1 Secondary Research

The foundation of this project was built through extensive secondary research into the cultural, historical and psychological meanings of the colour white. Scholarly works provided a theoretical backbone, most notably Michel Pastoureau's *White: History of a Color* (2020), which traces the shifting symbolic associations of white in Western culture, and David Batchelor's *Chromophobia* (2000), which critiques Western anxieties about colours. These were complemented by Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1983), which situates clothing as a semiotic code, and Alison Lurie's *The Language of Clothes* (1992), which interprets dress as a form of social communication.

Together, these texts framed white as more than a visual category, positioning it as a cultural signifier within fashion.

In addition to books, I consulted journal articles and reports on colour psychology, such as Elliot and Maier (2014), which examined how colour perception shapes human functioning, and Whitfield and Wiltshire's (1990) critical review, which identified methodological challenges in colour research. This allowed me to balance cultural perspectives with psychological insights, strengthening the interdisciplinary scope of my project.

Archival research played a key role in grounding theory in practice: collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) and The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) provided access to garments and fashion photography where white was central to design. For example, the V&A's displays of Edwardian bridal gowns offered insight into the evolution of Western bridal white, while the MET's archives on Japanese and Chinese textiles showed the cultural association of white with funerary rituals. Moreover, pictures of exhibitions such as *Fashioned from Nature* (V&A, 2018) further revealed how colour intersects with sustainability and material culture.

3.2 Primary Research

Primary research was conducted to incorporate voices from contemporary fashion practice. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with colour analyst and personal stylist Lisa Poggi as well as Milan-based bookshop owner Davide Lusito, who provided first-hand insight into creative decisions surrounding the use of white (whether for its aesthetic, symbolic or branding potential). Due to time constraints and occasional non-responses, not all planned interviews were realised, as in some cases collaborators withdrew despite prior agreement, echoing the unpredictability of working with external professionals. However, the interviews that did take place were invaluable in

adding immediacy to the research, revealing, for instance, that white is often chosen in editorial styling for its blank-canvas quality, allowing narrative or accessory elements to take prominence.

3.3 Focus groups and Audience Research

To understand how audiences interpret white in fashion, I conducted small-scale surveys with luxury clients and industry peers to gather quantitative data on colour preferences and associations. Interestingly, results revealed that participants associated white with concepts like ‘cleanness’ and ‘luxury’, rather than ‘emptiness’ and ‘exclusion’, highlighting how even different cultural narratives seem to have an overall ‘positive’ perception of this colour. Respondents were asked to rank colours they associated with key concepts such as ‘elegance’, ‘modernity’ or ‘mourning’: white consistently ranked high for purity and luxury, whilst its link to mourning varied depending on cultural background. This combination of qualitative and quantitative data offered a nuanced picture of how white is perceived by potential readers of the book (see Appendix - images 6,7).

3.4 Visual Research

Given the visual nature of both fashion and my chosen medium, visual research has been key. First, I analysed runway shows where white dominated the palette, including Jil Sander, The Row, Valentino, Chanel and Maison Margiela, identifying patterns of minimalism and purity in their design language; secondly, I observed advertising campaigns, particularly in the wellness and beauty industries, where white was consistently used to signify cleanliness, renewal and aspiration (Dior, Chanel, Guerlain, La Mer, SK-II).

Photography was another crucial dimension. The process of curating and editing imagery of white garments highlighted the editorial challenges of representing white on both digital and printed pages, where texture and materiality become essential for preventing visual flatness. Such empirical experimentation echoed Rose's (2016) emphasis on visual methodologies, where meaning is derived not only from text but from image selection and presentation.

3.5 Methodological Rationale

This project employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative, quantitative and visual research. As Creswell (2014) argues, mixed methodologies enable researchers to address complex questions by integrating multiple forms of evidence; qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, allowed me to access subjective interpretations of white, while quantitative surveys provided a broader overview of cultural differences; given the aesthetic nature of the subject, visual research was essential as well, enabling me to analyse both material and visual practices.

Ethnographic methods were particularly useful, as Pink (2013) suggests in *Doing Visual Ethnography*. Observing exhibitions, garments and runway shows in context provided much richer insights than textual analysis alone; however, I also had to acknowledge the limitations of my methodology, in that certain cultures were underrepresented due to language barriers, and my reliance on Western archives and exhibitions created a degree of Eurocentrism in the project. For this reason, I consulted a number of university students with different cultural backgrounds to verify the accuracy of the information and to incorporate a wider range of perspectives.

3.6 Reflexivity

My position of both researcher and journalist contributed to shaped the direction of this project: my studies in fashion journalism inclined me to prioritise narrative and visual presentation, while my academic background encouraged a more critical reflection on cultural meanings and implications. Despite being beneficial, this dual perspective implied the negotiation between the demands of rigorous research and the practical constraints of producing a visually engaging publication; recognising these tensions has been central to my methodology for ensuring that the book would be both academically grounded and accessible to a non-specialist readership.

4. Contextualisation Within the Media Industry

4.1 Fashion Publishing Landscape

The coffee table book format is historically associated with fashion, art and design publishing, positioned as collectible objects that combine visual richness with thoughtful commentary. Bridging the gap between journalism, art and commerce, they often function as both cultural artefacts and aspirational commodities; within the publishing industry, this format is typically produced in limited print runs and targeted towards niche but highly engaged audiences (McRobbie, 1998). In recent years, the fashion publishing sector has seen significant shifts: the decline of mass-market magazines such as *Glamour* and *InStyle* has been paralleled by the rise of independent and niche titles, often produced in small batches and distributed through curated outlets or direct-to-consumer

platforms (Rocamora, 2009). At the higher end of the spectrum, publishers such as Assouline and Rizzoli have created a market for luxury books that function as lifestyle objects, often displayed in homes as signs of taste and cultural capital. Therefore, a visually led, high-end book on white's symbolism in fashion perfectly aligns with this trend, offering both permanence and exclusivity in an increasingly fast-paced digital media environment.

4.2 Media Trends

The contemporary publishing industry is marked by a hybridisation where print and digital platforms complement rather than compete with one another. According to The State of Fashion 2024 report (McKinsey & BoF, 2024), audiences increasingly expect brands and media outlets to operate across multiple channels, integrating print, digital and social media into cohesive ecosystems, where print retains desirability as a tactile and permanent medium while digital platforms provide immediacy, interactivity and global visibility. This project situates itself at the intersection of these trends: the printed book will offer material permanence and collectability, while the dedicated Instagram profile (see appendix 8) extends the content into the digital space, reinforcing its identity as part of a luxury cultural brand. Unlike mass-market strategies that seek wide reach, the digital extension here is conceived as a curated gallery space that mirrors the book's aesthetic values, ensuring consistency across the two media.

4.3 Reader Profiles

Given the book's luxury positioning, its audience is defined by notions of exclusivity, collectability and cultural capital. Research and observation of luxury publishing consumption informed the identification of three key reader profiles:

1. The Luxury Consumer

Isabella Conti is a Milan-based 42-year-old art director who collect books as cultural artefacts. She often shop at concept stores, luxury department stores or galleries and value craftsmanship, exclusivity and design as much as content. She values design objects as markers of lifestyle and for her the book functions as both inspirational source and status object. The symbolic exploration of white in fashion resonates with her appreciation for timelessness, minimalism and exclusivity. Displayed on her marble coffee table as part of her curated domestic aesthetic, the book signals cultural taste and affluence.

2. The Fashion Insider

Li Wei is a Shanghai-based 28-year-old fashion buyer who navigates global fashion circuits with a critical and trend-savvy eye. Constantly traveling for Fashion Weeks, he follows avant-garde designers and has a professional interest in fashion history and semiotics. He engages with the book as a critical resource, linking fashion's symbolic use of white to global market trends. To him, the book functions as tool for visual inspiration, creative reference and positioning. He expects the highest production values, from premium paper to innovative layouts.

3. The Cultural Collector

Ananya Mehra is a 57-year-old New Delhi gallerist and philanthropist who bridges Indian heritage with cosmopolitan cultural networks. She is a enthusiast of rare and limited-edition titles and values

interdisciplinarity and cross-cultural narratives. For her, the book bridges personal cultural heritage with global fashion discourse, as both cultural reference and symbol of cosmopolitan taste.

By targeting these profiles, the book positions itself as a luxury cultural artefact situated within the economies of prestige and collectability.

4.4 Competitor Analysis - SWOT

To situate the book within the luxury publishing market, I conducted a SWOT analysis of key competitors:

- **Visionaire**
 - Strengths: ultra-luxury positioning, experimental formats, highly collectible;
 - Weaknesses: extremely limited accessibility, prohibitively expensive;
 - Opportunity: positioning my book as high-end but more accessible;
 - Threat: risk of being overshadowed by its reputation for radical innovator.

- **Assouline**
 - Strengths: benchmark for luxury publishing, global recognition, distribution through boutiques, hotels and galleries;
 - Weaknesses: broad catalogue, some titles can appear formulaic;
 - Opportunity: differentiation through a more conceptual focus on a single colour, offering a more intellectual depth;

- Threat: strong brand recognition sets a high entry bar.
- **A Magazine Curated By**
 - Strengths: high credibility through collaborations with major designers;
 - Weaknesses: highly industry-focused, may alienate general cultural collectors;
 - Opportunity: broaden appeal while maintaining cultural prestige;
 - Threat: directly competes for attention among fashion insiders.
- **Rizzoli**
 - Strengths: prestigious publisher of fashion monographs, strong international distribution;
 - Weaknesses: titles sometimes prioritise brand promotion over critical depth;
 - Opportunity: establish as a more critically engaged, concept-driven luxury publication;
 - Threat: its global reach and reputation may overshadow smaller projects.

This analysis highlights a gap in the market for a book that combines luxury production values with cross-cultural critical analysis, offering both exclusivity and intellectual richness.

4.5 Examples of Best Practice

Several publishers and platforms illustrate practices which are relevant to this project: *System Magazine* demonstrates how long-form journalism can be integrated into a visually compelling

product; *Apartamento* shows how a distinct editorial identity creates loyalty among culturally attuned readers; on social media, *Dazed* and *i-D* illustrate how cross-platform consistency strengthens brand identity; finally, *Assouline* demonstrates the power of positioning books as luxury lifestyle objects. By selectively drawing from these models, my project ensures coherence across editorial, design and distribution strategies.

4.6 Publishing Model

This issue marks the first in a collectible series of annual publications exploring the significance of colours in fashion. The book will be produced as a limited-edition print run, with each copy numbered and potentially accompanied by a certificate of authenticity. High-end production values are essential: heavyweight archival paper, clothbound or embossed covers and specialised printing techniques such as engravings, foil stamping or gatefolds to emphasise the visual qualities of white.

Pricing strategy will place the book within the luxury bracket, with standard editions priced around £150 (aligning with Assouline's mid-range titles), while special editions (slipcase, artist collaborations, signed copies) potentially between £250-£300.

Distribution strategy will prioritise curated retail environments:

- Concept stores such as Dover Street Market or 10 Corso Como.
- Luxury book retailers such as IDEA Books or Assouline boutiques.
- Museum shops including the V&A, MoMA Design Store and Palais Galliera.
- Direct-to-consumer through a dedicated website and integrated Instagram storefront.

This approach balances scarcity with prestige, ensuring the book remains exclusive yet attainable for the intended luxury audience.

4.7 Digital Extension

The Instagram profile will function as a curated digital gallery reinforcing the book's luxury identity. Aesthetic strategy will privilege minimalism, refined typography and photography emphasising texture and light, mirroring the visual languages of luxury brands such as The Row or Loewe.

Content strategy will include:

- Teasers from the book released in carefully timed drops;
- Behind-the-scenes glimpses of shootings, printing and editorial processes to emphasise craftsmanship;
- Cross-cultural spotlights linking to the book's themes;
- Collaborations with artists, museums or fashion houses to enhance prestige.

Engagement will be structured around exclusivity, with limited invitations to private launches or panel events and selected content available only to book purchasers or newsletter subscribers; this reinforces the notion of community as a form of cultural capital, consistent with the principles of luxury branding. As Rocamora (2009) notes, digital media increasingly shapes fashion's cultural meaning; in this project, Instagram becomes both an extension of the book and an autonomous cultural space, strengthening its presence as part of a luxury cultural ecosystem.

4.8 Diversity, Ethics, Sustainability

Although positioned within luxury publishing, this project emphasises diversity by presenting a wide and diverse range of global contexts, resisting the dominance of Western-centric narratives. Here ethical responsibility is central for ensuring that cultural practices are contextualised and not exoticised.

Sustainability is also a key concern: while luxury books are by nature limited in production, this project seeks to adopt eco-conscious practices such as recycled paper and environmentally friendly inks. Aligning with broader industry calls for sustainability (McKinsey & BoF, 2024), this aims at reinforcing the book's contemporary relevance.

4.9 Potential Revenue Models

Although primarily cultural, the book has commercial potential as well. Revenue may be supplemented by:

- Luxury brands partnerships, with fashion houses sponsoring specific sections or events;
- Institutional sponsorships, as collaborations with museums or cultural foundations;
- Events and exhibitions, with panel discussions, gallery showcases or fashion week presentations;
- Merchandise extensions, with limited prints, curated objects or exclusive collaborations linked to the book.

These additional revenue streams strengthen the project's positioning within the luxury cultural market, ensuring that it is not only sustainable but also scalable.

5. Limitations

5.1 Practical Constraints

Among the challenges, time management proved to be the most critical issue: while I accurately planned for research, I underestimated the time required for design and collaboration. This aligns with Buehler, Griffin and Ross's (1994) notion of the "planning fallacy", where individuals consistently underestimate the duration of complex tasks, particularly when external contributors are involved. The availability of collaborators, especially photographers and graphic designers, was another limiting factor, as high-end creative professionals were in high demand and most of them were unable to commit within the project's timeframe. In some cases, agreed-upon contributions did not materialise despite prior arrangements, which forced me to assume more responsibilities myself, from editing to visual layout.

5.2 Theoretical Limitations

Another limitation laid in the scope of research: while the project sought to represent white's symbolism across cultures, my reliance on English-language sources created an inevitable Western bias, with certain traditions, remaining underexplored due to limited access to translated academic

work. Although efforts were made to consult ethnographic material and cross-cultural scholarship, the book cannot claim to provide a fully exhaustive global coverage.

Similarly, while psychology of colour provided useful insights, it also revealed methodological difficulties: as Whitfield and Wiltshire (1990) note, colour psychology often suffers from inconsistencies and cultural biases, meaning that generalisations about emotional or behavioural effects of colours cannot be universally applied. This tension had to be acknowledged in the writing to balance psychological perspectives with anthropological and historical approaches.

5.3 Commercial Limitations

Positioning the book as a luxury object brings inherent commercial risks, as luxury publishing relies on exclusivity and therefore limits accessibility and circulation; while this aligns with the expectations of the intended audience, it also reduces the possibility of broader market penetration. Furthermore, high production costs (premium paper, specialised printing and limited runs) pose a significant barrier, in that without external sponsorship or partnership the project would struggle to achieve the desired production values at scale.

The competitive landscape also presents limitations: established publishers such as Assouline and Rizzoli dominate the luxury book market, benefiting from global distribution and strong brand recognition. As an independent project, my book lacks the same infrastructural support and, although this allows for greater creative freedom, it also restricts reach and visibility.

5.4 What I Would Do Differently

If repeating this project, I would build greater contingency into my schedule to accommodate delays and missed deadlines, particularly when relying on collaborators; I would also diversify my pool of collaborators earlier in the process, ensuring back-up options for essential tasks such as photography and design. From a research perspective, I would prioritise building partnerships with academics and institutions to ensure a more balanced representation of non-Western traditions, which might involve commissioning translations of key texts or collaborating with experts. On the commercial side, I would seek early sponsorship from luxury fashion houses or cultural institutions to secure the necessary budget for premium production, as such partnerships could enhance the project's credibility and visibility within the industry.

6. Conclusion

This project set out to explore the complex and paradoxical symbolism of white in fashion, situating it within cross-cultural traditions and contemporary industry practices. The central aim was to demonstrate that white is one of the most symbolically rich colours in fashion, carrying layered meanings of purity, mourning, modernity, sterility and luxury. Through a combination of primary and secondary research, the project has shown that these meanings shift dramatically across contexts, from bridal innocence in the West to funerary transition in Asia, from minimalist sophistication in luxury fashion to institutional authority in uniforms.

The research process highlighted the role of fashion as a symbolic system, as articulated by Barthes (1983) and later theorists such as Entwistle (2015). By analysing how white functions as a signifier

across cultures, the project demonstrated that fashion communicates not only aesthetic values but also cultural codes, social hierarchies and psychological associations. The book format provides a medium through which these insights can be communicated visually and narratively, bridging scholarship with journalism and creative publishing.

At the same time, the project contextualised itself within the contemporary media landscape, where luxury publishing is increasingly positioned as both cultural and commercial enterprise. The choice of a limited-edition, high-end coffee table book situates the project alongside publishers such as *Assouline*, *Rizzoli* and *Visionaire*, while its critical, cross-cultural perspective distinguishes it from lifestyle-driven titles. Finally, the inclusion of a digital extension via Instagram ensures that the book does not exist in isolation but participates in a hybrid media ecosystem.

The limitations encountered, namely time management, reliance on collaborators, restricted access to non-Western sources and the high costs of luxury production, underscored the challenges of independent publishing, yet they also revealed areas for growth; by adopting stronger project management strategies, building international academic partnerships and seeking sponsorship from luxury fashion houses or cultural institutions, the project could expand its scope and achieve the premium production values it aspires to.

Looking forward, this project has significant potential for development: the book could serve as the first in a series dedicated to the symbolism of colours in fashion, each volume exploring a different hue through cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspectives; the digital extension could evolve into a platform for exhibitions and external collaborations. In doing so, the project not only would enrich fashion journalism but also contribute to broader cultural conversations about diversity, symbolism and the global language of dress.

Ultimately, the project demonstrates that white emerges in fashion as a colour of profound depth, contradiction and cultural resonance; by interrogating its meanings across different contexts, the work shows fashion's ability to communicate, transform and connect cultures.

7. Critical Evaluation

7.1 Introduction

This project involved the creation of a high-end coffee table book exploring the cultural and historical symbolism of the colour white. The aim was to show how the significance of this colour is deeply embedded within most societies, extending across languages, cultures, religions and traditions.

Etymologically, the term 'white' derives from Old English *hwīt*, linked to brightness, clarity and illumination, with cognates across Germanic languages such as Old High German *wīz* and Old Norse *hvitr* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2025). Similar associations can be traced across other Indo-European languages: the Latin *candidus* (lit. 'bright, shining, pure') gives us the English word 'candid' (Lewis and Short, 1879), while Greek *leukos* (λευκός), meaning 'white', 'bright' or 'light', survives in scientific terms such as 'leukocyte' (Liddell and Scott, 1940); the Sanskrit *śveta* likewise denotes meanings of 'whiteness' and 'brightness', showing how the same root connects this hue with a overall idea of luminosity across a number of cultural and linguistic traditions (Monier-Williams, 1899).

Psychologically, white is associated with purity, peace, simplicity and cleanness, informing the ways it is widely employed in design, branding and rituals. Historically and cross-culturally, the

symbolism of white is rich and often paradoxical: in many Western traditions it represents innocence and celebration, as in weddings, while in East Asian cultures it is more commonly linked to mourning and impermanence. Religious and artistic contexts further add layers of complexity to its meaning, from the white robes of Christian saints to the Buddhist use of white in funerary practices. This paradox underpins the relevance of my project within current fashion and societal landscapes, highlighting how white warrants in-depth exploration as a cultural symbol.

In this critical evaluation, I will reflect on the overall process of the book's development, including my organisational and time management skills, my engagement with external contributors and the challenges I faced. I will also discuss what I have learned throughout this process, as long as the way the project could be extended or enhanced in the future. To provide structure to this reflection, I will draw on Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988), consisting of six stages, namely description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan.

7.2 Description

The very first phase of this project began with extended research into the symbolism of white in fashion, spanning artistic, religious, and political fields drawing on both primary and secondary sources. These included the drawing on books and online articles, as well as the collection of primary material through live interviews. Since this first stage was largely within my control, I was able to plan and organise my research effectively using thematic notes and structured timelines.

Meanwhile, I reached out to potential photographers and to my graphic designer, with whom I curated the visual and editorial aspects. The aim was to produce a cohesive balance between text and images that would aesthetically engage readers while also providing academic depth. While only a few collaborators contributed valuable material, most of them were unable to meet the

required deadlines, which required me to adapt my content-planning schedule as well as some visual outputs. For instance, several shootings were cancelled after weeks of correspondence with the photographers, resulting in a gap in the intended visual narrative. Overall, I decided to undertake the majority of the work myself because of recurring delays which made the collaboration with external contributors too unpredictable, given the limited time available.

7.3 Feelings

Especially at the beginning of the project, I felt enthusiastic and motivated; despite acknowledging the responsibility of covering such a meaningful topic, which is likely to be culturally sensitive, I was challenged to bring together different perspectives on such an overlooked subject, often perceived as simple and basic but actually deeply imbued with a rich symbolism.

Despite periods of anxiety and frustration. My overall organisation has proven to work in a way to overcome the challenges with which I was presented. Especially thanks to a consistent liaising with my graphic designer since the first day of our collaboration, I felt reassured that the project would have achieved its visual ambitions. Similarly, I managed to arrange a shooting on my own throughout the coordination of some people that I knew would have proven to be suitable for offering their contribution, therefore I felt encouraged to persevere throughout the whole process despite the setbacks that may have come across.

7.4 Evaluation

As in every piece of work, both strengths and weaknesses are present. My ability to manage research was definitely a strength, since I maintained a consistent workflow, used detailed notes and

organised my findings thematically. Moreover, ensuring that each topic was deeply researched through different sources, even though I knew that eventually I wouldn't have included it in my book, gave all the sections clarity and depth.

On the other side, collaboration was more challenging. On the positive side, the contributions I did receive elevated the project, as the visual material and design input created a professional finish that I could not have achieved alone. On the negative side, my partial reliance on external contributors introduced vulnerability, in a way that delays, missed deadlines and the shootings' cancellation undermined the scope of the project and led me to rethink my content structure.

Overall, time management was the main area of weakness. Although my initial timeline was realistic in theory, I did not anticipate how long the delivering, editing and revision of contents would take once delays accumulated. As a result, I felt a strong pressure towards the end of the process and I had to make compromises on certain aspects of the book, most notably the printing - which I am already planing to proceed with in the next months.

7.5 Analysis

In reflecting on the overall process, it becomes clear why some aspects progressed smoothly while others proved more more problematic. The step which I had most control on was the research process, for which I relied on my determination, ambition and self-discipline. By contrast, depending on others for collaborations proved to be challenging, in that the ones with whom I relied on informal agreements, assuming goodwill would be sufficient to ensure timely delivery, proved to be unreliable. For this reason, with my graphic designer I decided to established clearer expectations from the outset through a written agreement and a payment stipulated in advance. This

obviously mirrors the broad reality of publishing, where projects rely on multiple actors and success depends as much on coordination as on individual effort and skills.

The most critical point was time management issues, which arose because I did not incorporate sufficient contingency into my schedule. I am aware of the fact that creative projects are inherently unpredictable, yet I have underestimated how much delays in one area could affect the whole timeline. In psychology, research on time estimation bias suggests that individuals often misjudge how long complex tasks will take, particularly when they involve dependencies on others (Buehler, Griffin and Ross, 1994; Roy, Christenfeld and McKenzie, 2005). Overall, while my planning for the research phase was accurate, I misjudged the time required for design and collaborations, areas which were less within my control. These almost uncontrollable challenges highlighted the vulnerability of qualitative research when dependent on human factors; however, I was able to adapt by incorporating additional visual material and secondary research.

7.6 Conclusion

Having finalised the whole project, I now recognise the importance of building realistic schedules in advance, so as to include buffer periods for delays; this reflective process has deepened my professional awareness of the complexities involved in creative cultural production, with contributors needing clear agreements, deadlines and accountability - especially if they play a crucial role for the delivering of the project. Most importantly, I have learned that setbacks are an inevitable part of any creative and journalistic work, and they provide opportunities to develop resilience, problem-solving skills and adaptability. Just as the symbolism of white has a twofold meaning, representing both beginnings and endings, my project's process mirrored this

ambivalence, demonstrating that challenges are not purely negative but can also open space for innovation.

7.7 Action Plan

For the future development of this project I will make several strategic changes. First, I will adopt project management tools such as Trello or Gantt charts to monitor progress and allow for contingency planning. Indeed, my experience suggests that projects are more likely to be successful when timelines are broken into smaller milestones with clear accountability. Thus, by building in buffer periods for revisions and delays I can manage time more effectively and reduce last-minute pressure. Second, I will formalise every collaboration by setting written expectations with contributors, so as to safeguard deadlines and ensure accountability. I will also broaden my pool of collaborators to include multiple photographers to reduce the risk of overreliance on a single individual.

In terms of expanding the editorial content, I could expand the book to include other fields such as beauty, art and psychology. Technologically, I intend to curate a dedicated Instagram profile to share additional visual material, extracts and behind-the-scenes, building a community through curated hashtags and collaborations with artists, cultural organisations and designers. The social media outreach obviously create opportunities for networking and attracting potential sponsors or publishers as well.

Finally, this project has been conceived to serve as the foundation for a broader series on the symbolism of colours in fashion. Cultural histories of red, black, yellow or purple, for example, would not only expand the academic reach of the project but also align with the commercial trend for collectible items, particularly when their availability is limited. By developing partnerships with

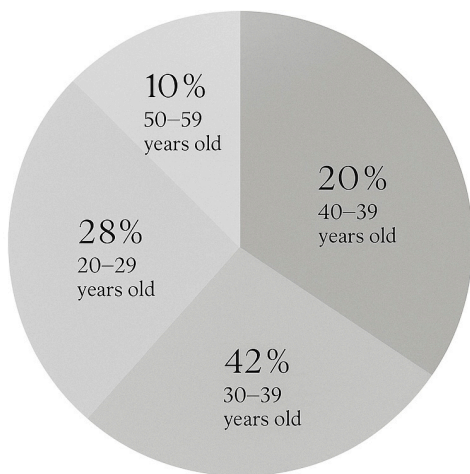
museums, cultural institutions, or design publishers - I am planning to propose a collaboration to Pantone company -, I could secure sponsorship and expand budget to allocate for the printing, especially the use of high-quality paper, engravings and pieces of cloth.

By implementing these strategies I will not only strengthen my organisational and collaborative practices but also ensure that the project has a sustainable future.

Appendix

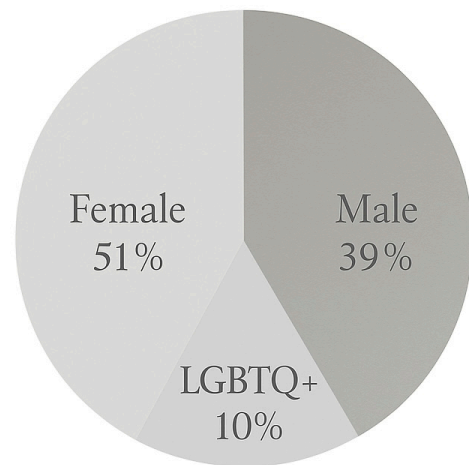
1. Survey's Results

RESPONDENTS BY AGE (n=50)



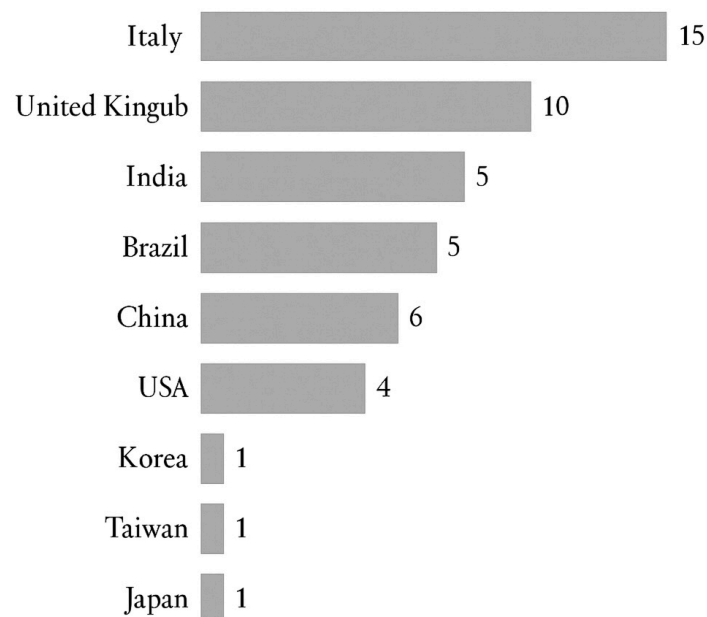
2. Survey's Results

RESPONDENTS BY GENDER & IDENTITY (n=50)

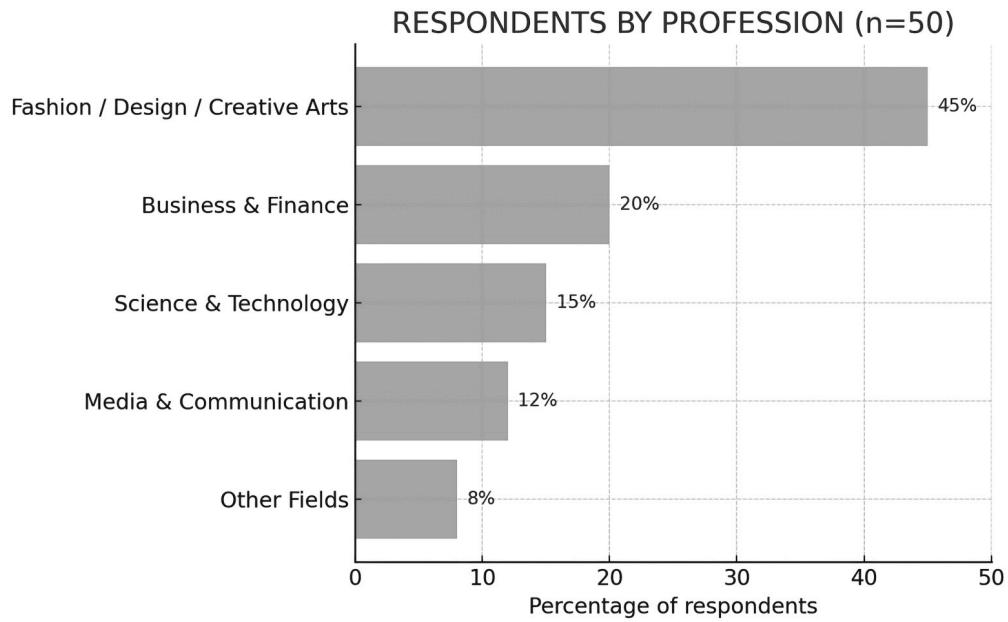


3. Survey's Results

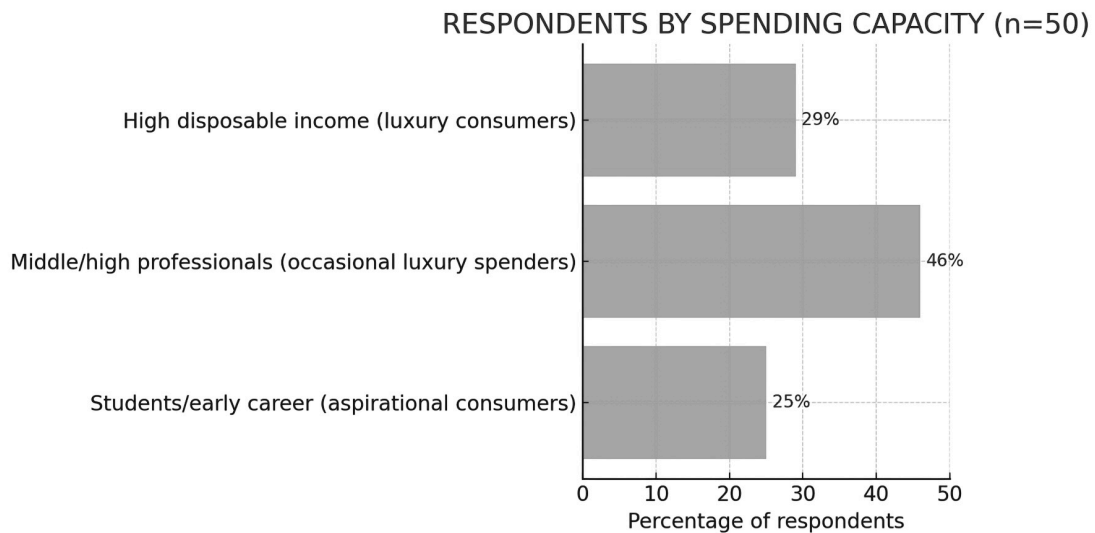
RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRY (n=50)



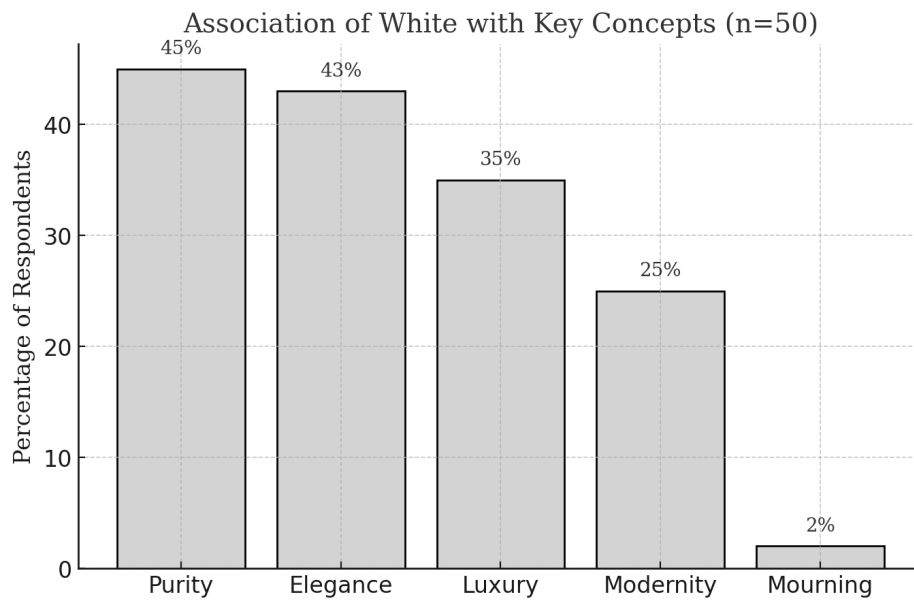
4. Survey's Results



5. Survey's Results

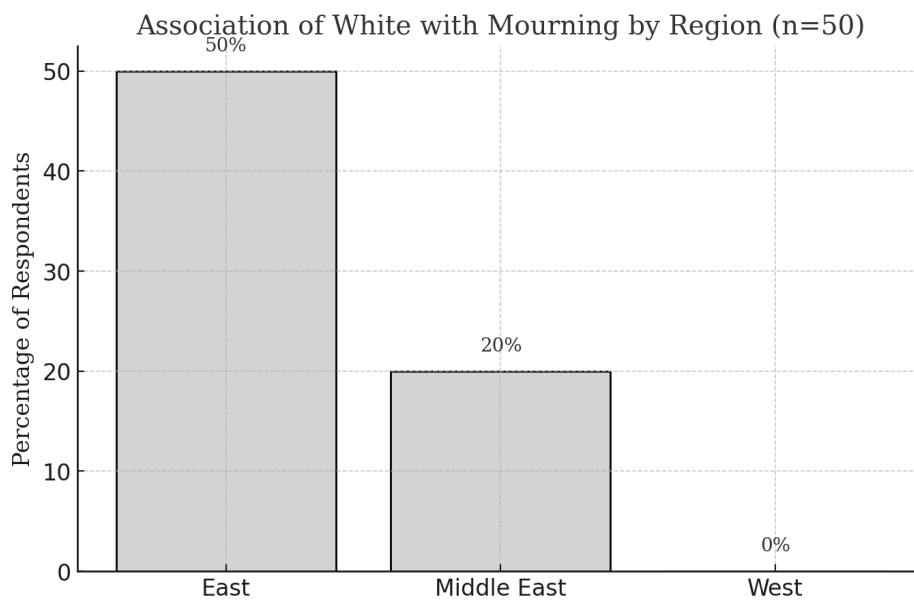


6. Survey's Results



Source: Author's survey, 2025

7. Survey's Results



Source: Author's survey, 2025

8. Instagram Profile

< **theralcollection**



RAL9010 • White

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post

12
follower

3
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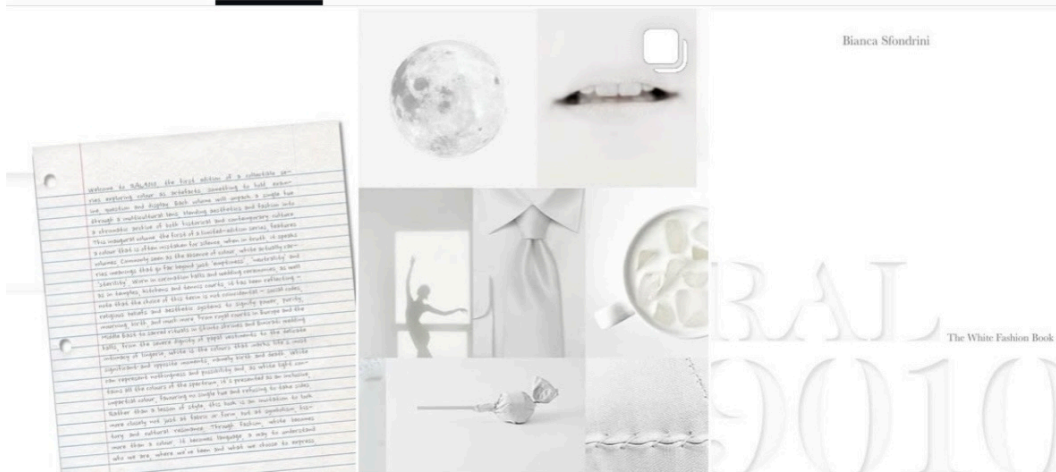
The first curated series of colours in fashion
One book, one shade
Volume I → W H I T E



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Messaggio



Bianca Sfondrini

The White Fashion Book

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