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**AN INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETS:  
THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT FASHION ENTREPRENEURS**

Porto Alegre

2020

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Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre em Gestão e Negócios, pelo Programa de Pós Graduação em Gestão e Negócios da Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos – UNISINOS.

Orientador: Professor Dr. Marcelo Jacques  
Fonseca

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Porto Alegre

2020

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on institutional approaches, this work investigates the role of institutional entrepreneurs in market dynamics. Through the context of independent entrepreneurs in the fashion market, a qualitative research inspired on ethnographic approach was conducted, relying on several observations, interviews, netnography, and an immersive experience in the context. This work's findings imply that, motivated by a sense of social and environmental responsibility that emerged in the past years due to a set of social movements, independent fashion entrepreneurs, as newcomers in the market, engage in institutional entrepreneurship as they propagate an emerging logic in the organizational field, referred to as *slow logic*. Facing a confrontation of logics in the market, independent fashion entrepreneurs demonstrate to engage in initiatives, coherent to their business principles, that helps them to reach both legitimacy and profitability goals. These initiatives, such as independent brands collectives, coworkings, collaborative stores and independent fairs, are observed to play a catalyst role in the market evolution.

**Key-words:** market dynamics, institutional logics, legitimacy, entrepreneurship.

## RESUMO

Com base em abordagens institucionais, este trabalho investiga o papel dos empreendedores institucionais na dinâmicas de mercado. Através do contexto de empreendedores independentes no mercado da moda, foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa inspirada na abordagem etnográfica, contando com observações, entrevistas, métodos de netnografia e uma experiência imersiva no contexto. Os resultados deste trabalho sugerem que, motivados por um senso de responsabilidade social e ambiental que surgiu nos últimos anos devido a um conjunto de movimentos sociais, empreendedores independentes de moda atuam como empreendedores institucionais à medida que propagam uma lógica emergente no campo organizacional, chamada neste trabalho de *lógica slow*. Diante de um confronto de lógicas institucionais no campo, os empreendedores independentes da moda se engajam em iniciativas coerentes com seus princípios de negócios, que os ajudam a alcançar seus objetivos relacionados legitimidade e rentabilidade. Observa-se que essas iniciativas, como coletivos de marcas independentes, coworkings, lojas colaborativas e feiras independentes, desempenham um papel catalisador na evolução do mercado.

**Palavras-chave: dinâmicas de mercado, lógicas institucionais, legitimação, empreendedorismo**



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

"We want to unite people and organizations to work together towards radically changing the way our clothes are sourced, produced and consumed so that our clothing is made in a safe, clean and fairway. We believe that collaborating across the whole value chain — from farmer to consumer — is the only way to transform the industry. Our mission is to bring everyone together to make that happen" ([www.fashionrevolution.org](http://www.fashionrevolution.org)).

The manifest of the Fashion Revolution movement, a non-profit organization that is present in over a hundred countries today, is a claim for change. The movement was created as a response to one of the biggest disasters that the fashion industry has ever faced: the collapse of Rana Plaza, a garment factory in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, that killed 1.134 people and had over 2.500 injuries in the year of 2013. The employees of this factory were working on poor conditions, producing clothes - which would be cheaply sold to other countries - as fast as possible, in order to generate high profits for the company. This deadly accident is an extreme example of the negligent and abusive practices that the global fashion industry has been operating through, with business models that end up generating highly negative outcomes to societies and the environment. In the same year of this episode, the Fashion Revolution movement began a worldwide campaign in order to raise consumers' and producers' awareness about the harmful impacts that the fashion industry was provoking, instigating changes in the whole field. Thus, one of the actors that, willing to contribute to the dissemination of these new institutional logics in the field, are playing an important role in the evolution of the fashion market through their practices and discourses, are the independent fashion entrepreneurs.

Through the institutional approach, authors define markets as organizational fields that are governed by institutional logics - which are a socially and culturally construction of shared beliefs, norms and values among actors, serving as guidelines for their practices (HUMPHREYS 2010a, 2010b; SCARABOTO AND FISCHER, 2013; DOLBEC AND FISCHER, 2015; KJELDGAARD et al., 2016). Drawing on previous contributions from market dynamics researches through institutional theory lenses, this work investigates the role of independent fashion entrepreneurs in the transformation of the fashion market, and how initiatives that connect these actors

are playing a catalyst role towards this transformation and contributing to their legitimation within the institutional environment.

First, a retrospective of prior findings around the theme will be conducted to highlight relevant concepts that will elucidate this investigation. Authors have studied the role of institutional entrepreneurs in market evolution, defining them as actors who engage in disseminating new institutional logics in the organizational field (RAO ET AL., 2000; SCARABOTO AND FISCHER 2013; KING AND PEARCE, 2010; ERTIMUR AND COSKUNER-BALLI, 2015; KJELDGAARD ET AL., 2016). These researchers have investigated how determined actors, dissatisfied with some aspects of the field, collectively work to alter markets through their discourses and practices, proposing new values, beliefs and norms to be institutionalized among societies. Scaraboto and Fishcer (2013) for example, analyzed how fashion consumers were influenced by and also became independent entrepreneurs, contributing to market dynamism and instigating the development of product diversification. Collective action has also been discussed by Kjeldgaard et al. (2016), as they analyzed the context of the evolution of the beer market in Denmark. The authors discussed how consumers may work strategically, through formally organized activities, promoting changes in the logics of competition of the market. In this sense, considering that markets are also a platform of contestations among actors, once they must connect and satisfy the needs of several people and organizations (KING AND PEARCE, 2010), it becomes relevant to investigate how actors behave in a field of plural logics.

Through the context of the yoga market in the US, Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015) studied how brands, navigating through plural institutional logics, influence on market dynamics, outlining how their strategies may attract and engage other actors in the field. Their contributions are relevant for the present work because they also discuss on how brands may attain legitimacy through their practices, managing conflicting demands of institutional logics in the field. Legitimacy, as widely discussed by marketing researchers, relates to the social, cultural and political acceptances from the actor's in the context, meaning that in order to achieve it, organizations must demonstrate, through symbolic meanings and material practices, that they fit into societies' shared norms (KATES, 2004; ARNOLD ET AL., 2001; HUMPHREYS, 2010a, 2010b; DE CLERCQ AND VORONOV, 2011).

Delving in the context of independent entrepreneurs in the fashion market of Porto Alegre, Brazil, this work proposes to identify how these actors are influenced

by and act as institutional entrepreneurs in this market; and how the initiatives in which they engage in order to reach their profitability and legitimacy goals may influence on the dynamics of the fashion market. Thus, this work proposes the following guide question: **how the initiatives that connect independent entrepreneurs influence the dynamics of the fashion market?** The general and specific objectives of this work are presented as follows.

## 1.1 Objectives

Willing to answer the question proposed in this work, one general objective and three specific objectives were defined as a guide to the research, as presented in this section.

### 1.1.1 General objective

Analyze how the initiatives that connect independent entrepreneurs influence the dynamics of the fashion market.

### 1.1.2 Specific objectives

- 1) Characterize this segmentation of actors and the logics through which they navigate;
- 2) Identify the practices carried out by these actors in search of their profitability and legitimacy goals;
- 3) Analyze how these practices influence the dynamics of the fashion market.

This work contributes to theoretical discussions of market dynamics by looking into how independent fashion entrepreneurs, being influenced by and acting as institutional entrepreneurs, navigate through the institutional logics of the fashion market and act collectively towards changes in this field. To clarify the motivations for this research, the justification is presented as it follows.

## 1.2 Justification

After seeing many people around investing their time, money and energy to build a business of their own, which seemed to be a very interesting professional path to work on, I started paying attention to independent brands in Brazil, especially in Porto Alegre. Everytime I see some small creative business, I can't help observing their communication, their positioning, their range of products, how they interact with the consumers and how they connect to other brands and projects. It's more than an admiration of the entrepreneur's courage to build something they truly believe in, it's an excitement to comprehend how they manage to turn this into a business, considering that the dominant fast fashion system is still running.

I started having closer contact with independent entrepreneurs in 2016, after I graduated in Public Relations, when I started to frequent a coworking - a huge old house, close to where I live, in which many freelancers, independent entrepreneurs and businesses of the creative industry went to work on their stuff. At that time, I was working as coordinator of a french fashion school in Brazil, and home office was my reality since the beginning - and I loved it. After my university classes ended, I decided to sign up in this coworking, especially, to interact with other people on a daily basis.

Since my first week there, it really caught my eyes how the connections between entrepreneurs happened. From quick talks on the coffee station to deep conversations in the backyard, over the sun, or in some entrepreneur's particular room, while they were working, it was amazing how much these connections paid off. The subjects were varied, from personal life to business. I considered it something like a working club, where people gathered to see friends and do business. And even working on another enterprise - in which there was a lot of entrepreneurship going on, also - I couldn't help starting to think to develop one on my own.

I was at the perfect place to develop my brand: in the coworking, there were many other independent entrepreneurs from the creative industry who have had many experiences, had good supplier references, and had the expertise necessary to build a business. And even better: they were willing to cooperate. They never hesitated in sharing contacts, references or ideas.

In 2018, I launched my brand. I can easily say that my brand was born in that coworking. If it wasn't for the connections and the experiences I lived in there, maybe

it would never have happened. The business I started to develop, though, is not just about selling the products - it's about encouraging independent entrepreneurs, photographers, designers and artists, sharing their creative process and supporting their business. Therefore, my interest in independent entrepreneurship arose: I was (still am) living this reality, directly connecting with many other entrepreneurs and working for this segment to evolve. In the meantime, when I began the Professional Masters classes on Management and Business, I started to look at this panorama through a business perspective more than ever.

When it was time to decide the subject to write about in this dissertation, independent entrepreneurship was a strong option - not only because I was living this reality, but mainly because I was seeing (and still am) an increasing number of people taking a risk in this path, many people around supporting these independent brands, and many initiatives (both public and private) encouraging this segmentation. Despite this universe of independent entrepreneurs was barely discussed in classes, my willingness to learn deeper about the subject did not decrease. Actually, quite the opposite: I felt that this subject deserved to be better studied.

The delimitation of the subject and the choice of the context were due to an genuine interest in comprehending how the connections among independent entrepreneurs in creative areas could be shaping the market dynamics where they are inserted in. The focus is on the fashion market, due both to the relevance of this segment in the society and to my proximity to this segment. Fashion, it must be said, is not just about what people wear - it is a genuine reflection of economic, political and cultural aspects of the societies. The fabrics, the modeling, the accessoires, the design, the styles... nothing is by chance. Observing it is one of the most interesting ways to comprehend more of past and current societies contexts.

It is important to consider that this scenario of independent entrepreneurship and coworkings is relatively recent, and despite several studies and articles about this field have been written lately, there's much more being developed. And these initiatives that connect entrepreneurs, such as coworkings, fairs and collaborative stores, for example, seem to have been playing a crucial role in the (re)formation of the fashion market, as they encourage independent entrepreneurs to evolve and concretize their business.

In this way, this work aims to provide a contribution to the theoretical debate in the area of the market formation, which is constantly evolving along with economic,



political and social changes. As entrepreneurs of the creative industry have become considered an economic force, developing regions and countries (KON, 2016), it becomes relevant to better comprehend how the arrangements and dynamics among these actors occur. Hence, the motivation to develop this work is due to a willingness to 1) contribute to academic discussions on market dynamics through the lenses of institutional theory, to 2) better comprehend how independent fashion entrepreneurs navigate through the institutional environment in which they are inserted, and 3) to explore new perspectives and insights in order to improve advances in this segmentation of the market.

This work is divided into four more chapters. Chapter 2 furthers previous contributions from relevant authors in marketing research, presenting the theoretical framework that will shed light on several concepts and highlight some previous findings regarding market dynamism. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this research, explaining the procedures of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 brings the findings of the research, which will be discussed in chapter 5 along with the conclusions of this work.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter, divided into two sections, presents relevant theoretical concepts and contributions from previous researches in market studies. The first section introduces a literature review of what markets and how they evolve, providing further comprehensions about this field of study. The second section addresses the institutional theory as the theoretical framework of this work, highlighting its main concepts and contributions from prior market studies through these lenses.

### 2.1 What are markets and how they evolve

Before discussing how markets evolve, it is convenient to first illustrate what markets are. As observed by Harrison and Kjellberg (2017), definitions and concepts of markets in academic researches may differ depending on the theoretical approach adopted in work. The authors analyzed several market studies among different academic disciplines, and with a special focus on economics and marketing, they identified some of the main approaches and highlighted how each defines and conceptualizes market, as summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Definitions of market through different theoretical approaches.

<b>Theoretical approach</b>	<b>Definition of market</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
Industrial Organisation	The industry (structure) is the market; Market structure refers to certain stable attributes of the market that influence the firm's conduct in the marketplace.	There are some structural prerequisites for perfect competition; available production technologies and basic conditions significantly influence market structure by making certain solutions more cost efficient.
New Institutionalism	A market is a set of institutions created and maintained to support transactions of particular types between market actors.	Institutions matter because transaction costs exist ("when it is costly to transact, institutions matter"); actors are boundedly rational and prone to act opportunistically

Market Design	Similar to New Institutional Economics; Market tasks and mechanisms (algorithms / microstructures are clearing houses).	Market failures can be resolved or addressed by deliberate attempts to design or redesign markets; design institutions to correct market failure; actors are able to state their preferences and are boundedly rational.
Markets-as-networks	Market is a network of exchange relationships; patterns of interaction episodes form exchange relationships.	Interaction and interdependence (connectedness); multiple layers of substance and function; resource heterogeneity; dyadic structures as actors; direct and indirect relationships.
Marketing management	Markets are meetings of sellers and buyers. Product markets; geographical markets; customer-need based markets.	The environment is those who serve the same customers with the same offering; a demand-side focus; markets and industries are not synonymous.

Source: elaborated by author, based on Tables 2 and 3 of Harrison and Kjellberg (2017).

Different theoretical approaches offer different perspectives regarding markets, as shown in Table 1. According to Harrison and Kjellberg (2017), while the *industrial organization approach* sees markets as industries, focusing mainly on the selling-side of the economy, the *marketing management approach* posits that markets are mainly exchanges between sellers and buyers, with a focus on the demand-side. The *market-as-networks approach* addresses to markets as networks of interconnected exchanging relationships; the *institutional approach* refers to markets as a set of institutions, such as property rights, informal customs and formal rules; and the *market design approach* tends to focus on market's microstructures, understanding that its failures may be solved via algorithms. The relevance of understanding the plurality of theoretical approaches, as stressed by Harrison and Kjellberg (2017), relies on the authors' assumption that different approaches may assign different roles to different types of actors.

Similarly, Geiger, Kjellberg and Spencer (2012) provided an overview of the different theories through which market researches have been approached in interdisciplinary studies, summarizing how each approach characterizes markets. Table 2 shows the different perspectives.

**Table 2:** Characterizations of market through different theoretical approaches.

<b>Theoretical approach</b>	<b>Characteristic view of markets</b>
Industrial Organization	Focus on the selling side of the market – the industry. Emphasizes how basic conditions of material factors influence market structure, conduct, and performance.
Marketing management	Markets as collections of actual and potential customers, broadly construed as independent from each other. The market is “already there” and sellers should seek to orient themselves towards it by adjusting their marketing toolkit based on available resources.
Consumer Culture Theory	Market and consumption practices are seen as social and cultural phenomena. Focus on consumers (individual and collective) as market actors and on the interrelation of culture and consumer identity mediated through the market via consumption objects. Emphasis on bricolage of meanings and on cultural fragmentation.
Markets as Networks	Markets are constituted by interconnected long-term exchange relationships between interdependent actors, who undertake transfer and transformation activities employing heterogeneous resources whose characteristics depend on their use.
Markets as Practices	Constantly “in the making,” markets are practical outcomes of economic organizing processes involving parallel efforts to shape markets according to particular templates. Market agents are hybrid collectives whose capacities to act depend on how they are being constituted (equipped). Market objects and devices are central in this and are both shaped by and shape market practices.
Institutional Approaches	Stress the import of formal and informal rules, habits, and ideas on markets. Variants focusing on the informal often emphasize mimetic behavior, while those attending to formal institutions emphasize emergence as a result of political actions and power relations. Material aspects are typically not in focus, although resources may provide power.

Source: elaborated by author, based on Table 1 of Geiger, Kjellberg and Spencer (2012).

This brief overview of how different theoretical approaches characterizes markets reveals that markets are not one specific phenomenon, once its analysis may differ depending on the perspective of one’s study. Besides the approaches shown in Table 1, Table 2 characterizes two other relevant theoretical approaches: *Consumer Culture Theory* (see ARNOULD AND THOMPSON, 2005), and *markets as practices*, considering that in the first, markets and consumption practices are social and cultural phenomena, and in the second, markets are practical outcomes, having objects and devices as a central point.

Despite these different approaches, what could be a converging point among them all? Geiger, Kjellberg and Spencer (2012) identified that even through different

perspectives, scholars seemed to share a general understanding of markets as sites of multiple actors, objects, political interests and cultural influences, referring to what Boyer (1997) calls “really existing markets”. In his study, Boyer (1997) argues that the efficiency of markets depends upon the institutional settings in which they are operating.

Given these perspectives of how markets can be defined, further discussion on how they evolve is addressed. In the last couple of decades, scholars, through different theoretical approaches, delved in comprehending what leads the dynamics of markets. Table 3 shows some of the main references used in the development of this work, highlighting the context, the theoretical approach and the main contributions of each author.

**Table 3:** Previous studies of market dynamics

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Theoretical approach</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
Tonelli et al. (2018)	Craft breweries in Brazil	Practice theory and institutional theory	How actor’s discursive strategic practices legitimate and institutionalize industries
Kjellberg and Olson (2016)	Legal cannabis market in the U.S.	Institutional theory	How adjacent markets influence market (re)formation
Kjeldgaard et al. (2016)	Beer market in Denmark	Institutional theory	Formally organized activities from consumers have been observed to have great power to change institutional logics on markets
Dolbec and Fischer (2015)	Fashion consumers	Institutional theory	Consumers unintentionally altering markets; engaged consumers can precipitate the formation of new categories of actors in the field and the contestation of boundaries between established and emergent actor categories
Martin and Schouten (2014)	Motorcycle industry	Actor-network theory	Emergence of markets from consumption activity
Scaraboto and Fischer (2013)	Plus-size fashion consumers	Institutional theory	Consumers intentionally altering markets and product diversity
Gielser (2012)	Botox Cosmetic	Actor-network theory	Emergence of new markets initiated by marketers

Humphreys (2010a)	Casino gambling industry	Institutional theory	Social and cultural structures make an important difference in the development of new markets; Actors interested either in promoting or opposing a market have a strong influence in its legitimation
Humphreys (2010b)	Casino gambling industry	Institutional theory	The process of legitimacy as an institutional and historical process
Sandicki and Ger (2010)	Islamic veiling in Turkey	Practice theory	Consumers play key role in market formation; Formative role of fashion in the evolution of a new habits and social class
King and Pearce (2010)	Social movements and other change agents that bring contentiousness to markets	Social movement theory	Contentiousness as source of market dynamism. Actors mobilize resources and promote change-oriented collective action to generate lasting institutional change
Gielser (2008)	The war on music downloading	Consumer Culture Theory	Changes in existing markets through consumer's drama in marketplace
Weber et al. (2008)	Grass-fed beef and dairy	Institutional theory and Organizational Ecology	How social movements have helped to create new markets by building an audience for once ignored products, legitimating the role of entrepreneurs
Thompson and Conskuner-Baili (2007)	Organic food market	Co-optation theory	Consumers may successfully collaborate with entrepreneurial actors in a field to countervail the co-optation of countercultural meanings by mainstream marketers
Kates (2004)	Brand legitimacy in gay men's community	Institutional theory	Collective action frames—shared ways of interpreting meanings within social interaction—provide the connection between a community and its legitimate brands
Arnold et al. (2001)	Institutional semiotics of Wal-Mart flyers	Institutional theory	The isomorphism of environmental norms on a retailer's legitimacy among its consumer's constituency

Rosa et al. (1999)	Minivan	Sociocognitive perspective	The evolution of a new product category through the stabilization of sociocognitive structures among consumers and producers
Deephouse (1996)	Isomorphism in the strategies of commercial banks	Institutional theory	Organizational isomorphism increases organizational legitimacy

Source: elaborated by author.

Table 3 shows that authors have analyzed how markets evolve through the efforts from consumers, (GIESLER, 2008; SANDIKCI AND GER, 2010; MARTIN AND SCHOUTEN, 2014; DOLBEC AND FISCHER, 2015; KJELDGAARD ET AL., 2016), from marketers (HUMPHREYS, 2010a, 2010b; GIESLER, 2012), from collaborations among consumers and entrepreneurs (THOMPSON AND COSKUNER-BALLI, 2007) and also from social movements (WEBER ET AL., 2008). As observed in these studies, the efforts of actors may result in the creation of new markets (WEBER ET AL., 2008; HUMPHREYS, 2010a, 2010b; GIESLER, 2012; MARTIN AND SCHOUTEN, 2014), changes in existing ones (THOMPSON AND COSKUNER-BALLI, 2007; GIESLER, 2008; SANDIKCI AND GER, 2010; SCARABOTO AND FISCHER, 2013), and also on the creation of new product categories (ROSA ET AL., 1999).

Collective action from consumers, for example, were investigated by Kjeldgaard et al. (2016) through the context of the beer industry in Denmark, examining how consumers may work strategically to alter markets through formally organized activities. King and Pearce (2010) also address collective action, investigating how actors mobilize resources and generate lasting institutional change. With a special regard on the role of social movements in market changes, the authors highlight contentiousness as a source of market dynamism. Weber et al. (2008) also investigated how social movements have helped to create new markets by building an audience for once ignored products, such as the case of grass-fed beef and dairy that they studied.

Through the context of the motorcycle industry, Martin and Schouten (2014) analyzed how consumption activity may alter markets, conceptualizing the called consumption-driven market emergence. The authors also highlight how market

catalysts (nonhuman and hybrid actors) may influence market changes, leading to the formation and stabilization of new markets.

Consumers activities may provoke market alterations both intentionally (SCARABOTO AND FISCHER, 2013) and unintentionally (DOLBEC AND FISCHER, 2015). Through the context of fashion consumers, Dolbec and Fischer (2015) investigated how connected consumers who are avidly interested in a field may provoke unintended market changes; and through the context of plus-size fashion consumers, Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) explored how consumers are inspired by and act as institutional entrepreneurs, propagating new institutional logics and provoking changes in the market.

Efforts from marketers were investigated by Humphreys (2010a, 2010b) through the context of the casino gambling industry. In two articles, the author highlights the importance of social and cultural structures in the development and legitimation of new markets, and explains that the process of legitimacy is an institutional and historical process. As stressed by Giesler (2008: 739) "the processual understanding of how markets change requires the analysis of complex socioeconomic systems over time". The author also observes that historical forces have a strong influence on the evolution of markets, as his analysis on the war of music downloading proposed. In this study, Giesler (2008) illustrates the concept of marketplace drama, exploring how conflicts among opposing groups of consumers and producers may alter markets. The author also provides implications to theorize *market system dynamics*, which is later described by Giesler and Fischer (2016), referring to markets as a complex social system in which actors and institutions are mutually shaped by one another, assuming that discursive negotiations among different actors, as well their practices, are fuels for market changes.

Drawing on the theoretical lenses, the findings and contributions from the authors here approached, it is possible to understand markets as platforms of constant exchanges, contestations, negotiations, success and failures, involving people and material aspects in complex phenomena that embed social, cultural and political spheres. Market dynamics, thus, are the result of these interactions, which are constantly being reshaped along time.

As stressed in the previous chapter, this work aims to analyze how the initiatives that connect independent entrepreneurs influence the dynamics of the fashion market. After this brief literature review of what are markets and how they



evolve, the following section presents the theoretical framework adopted in the development of this work.

## 2.2 Institutional approach on market studies

As shown in the previous section of this chapter, market studies have been approached through different theoretical lenses. The theoretical approach that was considered to better suit the development of this work is the institutional theory, which, as pointed by Humphreys (2010b: 491) "is a framework for understanding the development, maintenance, and persistence of social structures called institutions". Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015: 40) address to this theory as it follows:

"Institutional theory posits that people and organizations exist within larger institutional environments with taken for granted social, cultural, and symbolic meaning systems that define their social reality. These environments are subject to "logics," symbolic and material organizing principles that direct and circumscribe thoughts, decisions, and behaviors of people and organizations".

Similarly, Dolbec and Fischer (2015) explain that through the institutional approach, markets can be interpreted as organizational fields that encompasses a set of institutions and actors, governed by institutional logics. As brought by Kjeldgaard et al. (2016: 3) "logics are socially and culturally constituted, and a variety of logics permeate society and culture. Logics are mobilized to legitimate and give sense to or transform the dynamics fields, in this case, markets".

Institutional logics, thus, are at the core of the process of legitimation of institutions. Humphreys (2010b) describes that legitimacy is "the process by which a practice or an idea becomes incorporated into the dominant, mainstream institutions of society", and stresses that this concept has three facets: cognitive, normative, and regulative, which will be furthered approached later.

Regarding institutional logics and the legitimacy of institutions, another relevant element in this process are the institutional entrepreneurs. As described by Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) institutional entrepreneurs are actors that, dissatisfied with some aspects of the status quo, take action in order to change the field by disseminating new institutional logics.

Before furthering discussions and bringing examples of contributions of market researchers through institutional theory, some key elements that will guide this work are highlighted in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Key elements in institutional theory.

Key elements	Definitions	References
Institutional environments	Institutional environments embed people and organizations "with taken for granted social, cultural, and symbolic meaning systems that define their social reality".	Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015: 40)
Institutional logics	"Symbolic and material organizing principles that direct and circumscribe thoughts, decisions, and behaviors of people and organizations through a socially constructed, historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules".	Ertimur and Coskuner Balli (2015: 40 apud Thornton and Ocasio 1999: 804)
Institutional entrepreneurs	"People or groups who attempt to act on their dissatisfaction in order to change the field".	Scaraboto and Fischer (2013: 186)
Legitimacy	"The process by which a practice or an idea becomes incorporated into the dominant, mainstream institutions of society".	Humphreys (2010b: 492)

Source: elaborated by author.

Table 4 shows some elements of the institutional approach that are highly relevant for market studies. Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015) explain that markets may operate through a dominant logic or through plural logics, which may coexist as competing or not competing. The process of replacement of logics, or the rivalry of logics in a determined organizational field are fuels for market changes, and are often (but not necessarily) operated by institutional entrepreneurs. Scaraboto and Fischer (2013: 186) highlight that "institutional logics both constrain and enable institutional entrepreneurs as they seek to legitimate new practices or delegitimate extant ones".

The legitimation process involves social, cultural, and political acceptances within its institutional environment, and it is solidified by a network of norms and beliefs that permeate the particular context (HUMPHREYS, 2010a; 2010b). Kates (2004) also refers to legitimacy as a social fit within the context, highlighting the need to investigate the meanings and sociocultural processes that either problematize or ensure the legitimacy of institutions among consumers.

Humphreys (2010a) furthers the comprehension of the concept of legitimacy by addressing the three pillars through which practices or institutions are legitimated: regulative, normative and cultural cognitive. Each pillar is described in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Pillars of legitimacy in institutional theory.

Degree of legitimation	Definition
Regulative	The degree to which a practice conforms to rules and regulations set forth by a superordinate organization, usually the government.
Normative	The degree to which the practice is perceived to be congruent with dominant norms and values, irrespective of legal status.
Cultural Cognitive	The degree to which the organization can be categorized and understood according to existing cognitive schemas and cultural frameworks.

Source: elaborated by the author, based on Humphreys (2010a).

The pillars shown in Table 5, as argued by Humphreys (2010a) serve as sociological or psychological functions that hold the legitimation process. In practice, legitimation can be evaluated by how consumers reward or punish determined actions from companies, for example. Humphreys (2010a: 3) suggests that:

"Social action under beliefs of legitimacy is more than blind obedience; it includes the complicity or approval of action on the part of the subject. Social actors need not fully accept a practice or institution for it to be legitimate, but they must conform their behavior to its existence".

The regulative legitimacy is the process that certifies and legalizes determined practices or institutions, adhering to regulatory activities that are usually approved by the government or regulatory agencies. Regarding the regulative legitimacy degree, Kjellberg and Olson (2016), through the context of the emerging legal cannabis in the U.S., argue that interrelations to other markets contribute significantly to constitute the social systems of regulated markets.

The normative legitimacy refers to the adherence of, and congruence with, existing norms and values in the social environment. Kates (2004: 456) points out that "these norms usually serve as implicit and flexible guidelines to which companies must adhere in order to maintain a moral fit with key publics". The normative legitimacy is independent of the regulative one, considering that determined practices

that are not legal, may yet be considered in agreement to groups or societies' shared norms (HUMPHREYS, 2010a).

The cultural-cognitive legitimacy is assigned by the taken-for-granted meanings and habitual patterns of behaviors (KATES, 2004; HUMPHREYS, 2010a; 2010b). Cultural-cognitive legitimacy is attained by how actors understand, or interpret determined practices. Kates (2004), for example, through the context of the gay men's community, evaluated this degree of legitimacy in brands among this public by investigating how they frame specific brands. The author suggested that this degree of legitimacy occurs from insider interpretations, rewarding legitimate brands, and punishing illegitimate brands.

Through the context of the yoga market in the U.S., Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015) examined the competitive dynamics of markets composed with plural logics, providing a managerial framework for managers to adapt brands in this context. The authors specified strategies for generalist and specialist brands, suggesting that regarding legitimacy within the market, generalistic brands could incorporate logic from adjacent fields and create new hybrid forms of practices; while specialist brands could collaborate with powerful institutional actors and advocate for political and regulatory support.

Legitimacy, institutional logics and institutional entrepreneurs were approached in several other market studies, especially regarding its dynamics. Table 6 addresses contributions from other authors who used institutional lenses in their works.

**Table 6:** Contributions from market researches through institutional approach.

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
Kjellberg and Olson (2016)	How adjacent markets influence market (re)formation.
Kjeldgaard et al. (2016)	Formally organized activities from consumers have been observed to have great power to change institutional logics on markets.
Dolbec and Fischer (2015)	Engaged consumers can precipitate the formation of new categories of actors in the field and the contestation of boundaries between established and emergent actor categories.
Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015)	Markets that are characterized by plural logics evolve over time as institutional actors with different cultural capital and interests amplify/repress distinct logics.

Scaraboto and Fischer (2013)	The influence of consumer's collective identity, institutional entrepreneurs and the mobilization of institutional logics in markets dynamics.
De Clercq and Voronov (2011)	How the characteristics of the field, as well as entrepreneur characteristics and actions, influence the legitimacy derived from adhering to the field-prescribed balance between sustainability and profitability.
Humphreys (2010a)	The role of normative and regulatory structures in facilitating the adoption and eventual acceptance of an industry through the social process of legitimation
Humphreys (2010b)	The influence of changes in the institutional environment over time on the meaning structures that influence consumer perception and practice.
Kates (2004)	The role of collective action in the cocreation and legitimacy of brands in communities.
Arnold, Kozinets and Handelman (2001)	The isomorphism of environmental norms on a retailer's legitimacy among its consumer's constituency.
Handelman and Arnold (1999)	The impact of socially oriented marketing actions (institutional actions) in a firm's legitimacy.
Deephouse (1996)	Organizational isomorphism increases organizational legitimacy.

Source: elaborated by author.

The role of institutional entrepreneurs, for example, were investigated by Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), Etimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015), Dolbec and Fischer (2015) and Kjeldgaard et al. (2016). These studies analyzed how actors engaged in dispersing new institutional logics among determined fields, promoting significant changes in its institutional environments.

Legitimation processes of industries, bands and firms were approached, respectively, by Humphreys (2010a, 2010b), Kates (2004) and Handelman and Arnold (1999). Studies from Arnold, Kozinets and Handelman (2001) and Deephouse (1996), explored organizations' legitimacy through practices of isomorphism, referring to this concept as the adoption of similar structures, strategies and processes of other organizations in its institutional environment. The practice of isomorphism was observed by the authors to help organizations to achieve legitimation within their contexts.

De Clercq and Voronov (2011) in exploring the legitimacy drivers that newcomers (entrepreneurs) to a field derive from balancing sustainability and profitability, reconceptualized these concepts as institutional logics, alleging that the

perspective of logics would enable them to study these concepts not as objective phenomena, but as outcomes and drivers of social construction and political contestation. Table 7 shows the characteristics of each logic designed by the authors.

**Table 7:** Characterization of sustainability and profitability logics.

	Sustainability	Profitability
<b>Dominant value</b>	Ecological footprint reduction; commitment to social justice and social responsibility	Wealth creation
<b>Supporting values</b>	Personal commitment to the environment and social causes	Personal commitment to wealth accumulation
<b>Production focus</b>	Waste reduction, cleaner is better, development of green technologies, responsibility	Speed to market, cost reduction
<b>Marketing focus</b>	Cultivate limited negative or increased positive environmental and social impact	Cultivate price and product performance
<b>Basis of mission</b>	Build reputation as a responsible social actor	Build reputation as a successful economic actor
<b>Basis of attention</b>	Develop and maintain low ecological footprint; promote fairness and justice	Develop and maintain financial success
<b>Basis of strategy</b>	Win sustainability and responsibility awards, obtain good reviews on sustainability-related issues	Secure broader market presence, establish superior market position
<b>Governance mechanism</b>	Stakeholders	Shareholders

Source: De Clerq and Voronov (2011).

Addressing entrepreneurship, sustainability, and profitability through the institutional approach, De Clerq and Voronov (2011) highlight that despite being competing logics, the dominance of one logic won't completely remove the other. The authors suggest that entrepreneurs can adhere to, and selectively draw from, the two logics to advance their own interests in the field.

The concepts of institutional logics, institutional entrepreneurs and legitimacy from the institutional approach will be widely addressed in the development of this work. In the following chapter, the methodology procedures of this research are described.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter initially approaches the specific context to be investigated in this research, which will lead to comprehending the choice of the methodology applied, argued in sequence. Next, the methods of data collection, and how they were applied, will be presented. Lastly, the data analysis process will be detailed.

#### 3.1 Context of the research

"The younger generation of the 21st century is becoming the most entrepreneurial generation since the Industrial Revolution", claims Kuratko (2005: 578). The author argues that over the last decades, entrepreneurship emerged as one of the most potent economic forces in the world, which led to a similar increase in education in this area. It is undeniable the fact that, each year, it is possible to observe that more people become entrepreneurs, either for necessity or opportunity.

According to surveys conducted by GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) and SEBRAE (Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service), Brazil is one of the most entrepreneurial countries in the world: in 2019, 52 million people were involved in entrepreneurial activities in the country, representing 27% of the national GDP. Among them, 9,03 million entrepreneurs were registered by the MEI (Individual Micro Entrepreneur) system, which was created in Brazil in 2008 as a solution to contemplate autonomous professionals in the Legality. Due to the creation of the MEI system, it became even easier for people to create their own business.

Considering that entrepreneurship evolves according to the economic needs of each period, supplying market demands by developing new products and services (QUEIROZ AND PARADELA, 2017), they play a key role in market evolution. Researchers observed that in the past decades, after saturation in some economic sectors, societies moved from industrial to a post-industrial setting, in which knowledge and information became valuable assets due to the perception of its potential to generate income and employment (KON, 2016). In this context, as creative industries started to get attention from its economics potentials, the creative economy has been internationally discussed as a development strategy for countries and regions (KON, 2016). Among the creative industries, the fashion industry has

been observed to be passing through deep transformations, restructuring its values and production logics.

In the past years, a wide number of independent fashion brands were created in Brazil. Surveys from GEM and SEBRAE also observed that, in 2019, among the business classifications of micro enterprises in Brazil, "trade of clothing and accessories" was the number one on the list of most registered. Differently from traditional retail stores, independent fashion brands are operated through more sustainable values and practices, as preached by the slow fashion movement - which arose as a strategy to provide equilibrium in this industry and gained more power among its actors after the Fashion Revolution movement carried out worldwide campaigns to create awareness regarding fashion production and consumption systems. Independent fashion entrepreneurs, in this sense, demonstrate to be playing a key role in the restructuring of the fashion market as they embrace and dissipate these new ideals of producing and consuming fashion.

The word "independent" which characterizes these actors is related to the fact that their business don't have financial support or investments from other companies - the investment usually comes from their savings or loans from different sources. Working as managers, creative directors, public relations and operations usually everything at once, these entrepreneurs use their creativity not only to develop their products, but also to find new meanings of exchange with their consumers. The fact that independent entrepreneurs usually work by themselves or in small teams instigated them to gather with other independent entrepreneurs in the fashion or other creative industries to develop strategies to strengthen their businesses.

Even being active in digital environments, independent fashion entrepreneurs engage in initiatives that provide them physical structures for production and commercialization of their products, such as independent fairs, collaborative stores and coworkings. Several events and digital initiatives were also developed to connect independent entrepreneurs in order to provide them knowledge about managing and structuring their businesses - after all, their strength is usually more related to creativity, not much business management.

Considering this context, which delineates the field of study, the present work analyzes how these initiatives that connect independent fashion entrepreneurs may influence their search for legitimation within the external environment, providing first



an investigation regarding the institutional logics through which these actors navigate in the institutional field.

### 3.2 Nature of the research

Being this work framed in scientific researches of social phenomena, it is substantial to consider prior reflections regarding perspectives on how societies are conceived. As approached by Hackley (2003) ontological questions, which refer to concepts of reality, have been approached in two different ways. The positivist paradigm understands reality as undeniable facts that occur independently from other's perspectives. Positivists, thus, posits that society exists and we can observe it, but they are objective and determined, unattached to how social interactions occur. On the other hand, the interpretivist paradigm implies that reality is a construction, that it doesn't exist as an objective fact, but as a sum and interaction among several forces based on the meanings that people give to objects. In the same way, by answering epistemological questions, which draws on the ways of knowing reality, interpretivists aim to understand the facts, rather than explaining it in dualistic ways. The present work fits in epistemological researches and adopts the interpretivist paradigm in its development.

Considering markets as platforms of exchange between producers and consumers (WEBER ET AL., 2008), its structure requires a clear understanding from both sides of what is being exchanged and why (HUMPHREYS, 2010a). Regarding perspectives on the relations between individuals and social structures, Castilhos and Fonseca (2018) offer an enlightening review. The authors stresses that, until the end of the 90s, scholars from Consumer Culture Theory (see ARNOULD AND THOMPSON, 2005) analyzed consumer practices and market dynamics mainly from two perspectives, one regarding individuals and the internal or external meanings over their consumption choices (agency perspective) and the other regarding how consumers' choices are reflected and reproduced by the social structures in which they are embedded in (structure perspective). Later, a third perspective emerges, providing a view that englobes and interacts aspects from the previous two. Referred to as poststructuralist, this perspective comprehends that consumers' choices and market fields are constantly influenced by each other in their development.

Considering the dynamic reformulations that run in markets, this work relies on this latter perspective, understanding that individuals' consumption choices and practices, as much the social structure in which they are inserted, are not separate constructions, but interactive forces that are constantly reshaped (CASTILHOS AND FONSECA, 2018).

Assuming that this work investigates a market phenomenon in which individuals' practices are delineated by the institutional logics through which they navigate, this exploratory research relies on qualitative methods. As stressed by Hackley (2003), qualitative methods are in the core of interpretivist approaches, once it looks for sophisticated and depth rather than generalized data. The author highlights that interpretivist researches require a rich theoretical basis in order to collect and analyze data, which enables the researcher to deeply explore the studied phenomena rather than just describing it. Qualitative researches, according to Flick (2007: 10), "are interested in accessing experiences, interactions and documents in their natural context and in a way that gives room to the particularities of them". Therefore, willing to comprehend not only what independent fashion entrepreneurs have practiced in order to achieve legitimation within the context in which they are inserted, but mainly why and how, this research counts with different and complementary sources of data collection. Before specifying the methods applied, the methodology of this research will be described as it follows.

### 3.3 Methodological approach

Willing to deeply comprehend the context, this research was conducted with inspirations on the ethnographic approach. The roots of ethnography come originally from cultural anthropology studies, especially from the end of the 19th century. By collecting extensive amounts of qualitative data, which, at that time, could only be recorded in field notes, researchers, during a long amount of time, examined the behavior of people in determining cultural contexts, seeking to understand, also, the interpretation of those people regarding these behaviors.

Despite all contradictions, one of the main references of ethnographic studies in history is the book "Coming of Age in Samoa", published in 1928 by the american anthropologist Margaret Mead. The author spent several months in Samoa, an

archipelago in Polynesia, studying the sexual life of teenage girls, theorizing that culture has a strong influence in their psychosexual development. Since those years, ethnographic studies evolved to other areas of knowledge, and became a methodology applied in studies not only of distant cultures, as it was done in its earliest, but also in closer ones. Moisander and Valtonen (2008: 47) explain that ethnographic researches started to gain space in marketing and consumer research, considering that this shift “has brought to the fore the multiple ways in which marketing and consumption play a role in constituting and mediating cultural values and norms”.

By its core, ethnography consists in studying determined social phenomena in its natural context; it requires intensive participation from the researcher; and the appliance of multiple sources of data collection (ARNOULD AND WALLENDORF, 1994; ARNOULD AND PRICE, 2006; HACKLEY, 2003). In its roots, ethnographic studies consisted mainly of observations, which would be extensively described in the researcher’s field notes. Lately, advances in technology enabled ethnographers to collect data through different tools, such as photographs and videos, and to record interviews, allowing researchers to transcribe interviews and analyze in detail participants’ discourses. And, of course, the field notes still represent a very important part of the process.

Scholars in marketing and consumer research have used the ethnographic methodology to study, for example, consumption rituals on Thanksgiving Day (WALLENDORF AND ARNOULD, 1991); consumption experiences of Mexican immigrants in the United States (PEÑALOZA, 1994); subcultures of consumption among Harley-Davidson owners (SCHOUTEN AND MCALEXANDER, 1995); emancipatory dynamics of the Burning Man project (KOZINETS, 2002A); and consumption-driven market emergence in the motorcycle industry (MARTIN AND SCHOUTEN, 2014). Differently from these examples, the present work focuses more on production rather than consumption activities, as it delves into the context of independent entrepreneurs in the fashion market.

Considering the poststructuralist perspective adopted in this research, it is relevant to recap that the social structures that embed people, as well as people’s interpretations and meanings regarding the external environment, are constantly influenced by each other in its development. In this sense, willing to properly identify and analyze the constellation of facets that compose and influence the context

described in the previous section of this work, an immersion in the context was accomplished, providing understandings of several forces that shape this field. This research differs from “simple” qualitative data collection because, as pointed out by Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), ethnographic studies enable researchers to understand phenomena through experience, providing a holistic and systematic comprehension of the studied field. More importantly, while getting along with independent entrepreneurs in their daily basis routine and participating in their activities, a scientific detachment allowed to observe the phenomena through theoretical lenses.

Understanding that ethnographic research requires a very long-term commitment, and taking in the view that the fieldwork of this research took place during 9 months (from May 2019 to February 2020), this work draws on ethnography in its development. Before detailing the data collection methods, I recall the anthropologists' maxim that guided the conduction of this research: making the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

### 3.4 Methods of data collection

During the fieldwork, different methods of data collection were applied in order to analyze and comprehend as better as possible the field of study. The research relied on observations, interviews and nethnography, which were all conducted taking in view the objectives of this research. Merging these methods enabled a systemic comprehension of the reproduction of participants' subjective meanings regarding their discourses and practices in the fashion field, and as the research evolved, more refined interpretations were being developed.

From the very beginning of the fieldwork, observations and nethnography were constant practices; and interviews started to be conducted one month later, by the time I was more familiarized with the context of study. Beyond these methods, which are described below, special attention regarding social, cultural and political spheres, in intemational, national and mainly local scopes was given. Understanding that the fashion market, just like any other, is a systemic field, I payed attention to several factors that could influence and improve the collection and analysis of data, recording it all in field notes.

### 3.4.1 Participant and non-participant observations

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015: 156), "experiencing a site from the inside is what necessitates the participant part of observation". Independent fashion entrepreneurs usually work either from home or from coworkings, and rarely they have their own work office. After I selected the sites and people to follow, which were chosen in order to get as many different perspectives as possible, I engaged in attending coworkings and independent fashion fairs, and also in following some independent fashion entrepreneurs in other activities related to their business. The writing of notes varied among my notebook, my cell phone and my computer, being all gathered in the computer later.

I started going to a coworking in where four independent fashion entrepreneurs worked, besides other independent entrepreneurs from creative sectors, mainly designers and artists. Besides spending time with the independent fashion entrepreneurs in each's rooms, I participated in the conversations between them and other entrepreneurs, which were quite frequent and usually took place in the collective areas. By attending this first coworking around twice a week, I got to know everyone there, and they did not hesitate in adding me to the coworking's group on WhatsApp.

While I attended this first coworking, I also followed other independent fashion entrepreneurs in their professional routines. One of the informants, for example, didn't have her own physical workspace in Porto Alegre, so she had meetings and planned events in other coworkings in the city. During the fieldwork of this research, an opportunity came by and she decided to grab it: along with other independent entrepreneurs from cultural sectors, they rented a commercial apartment in order to set their businesses, receive clients, do meetings and, occasionally, small events. Due to the proximity that I was having with them, they invited me to join them in this new coworking, and so I did. This was a rich opportunity to, more than ever, have an insider's view of the context of study, once I participated in all the group meetings and plannings.

In every activity I engaged during the fieldwork, especially during observations, I kept a scientific detachment that allowed me to catch subjective aspects of independent fashion entrepreneurs' discourses and practices, which were embodied in their both verbal and non-verbal communications. It was possible to

understand not only what they do in their daily professional routines, but also how they communicate and negotiate with other publics, what they valued the most when deciding what directions to take in their practices, and how they struggled to build a conscious and innovative brand.

Other sites that I attended were independent fashion fairs, in which I did both participant and non-participant observations. The difference between participant and non-participant observations, as stressed by Moisander and Valtonen (2008), is that in the first, the researcher participates in the activities while observing; and in the second, the researcher records the naturalistic behaviors of people in the context, not becoming a part of the event. During the fieldwork I attended five independent fashion fairs, merging observations from afar, uniquely observing how independent fashion entrepreneurs behave during the events; and also interacting with them, which resulted in several informal conversations.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, observations in the sites cited above were more generalized. After a certain time, when the field notes started to get repetitive, by combining data collected through other methods it was possible to identify further aspects of how independent fashion entrepreneurs negotiate their discourses in the institutional environment in which they are inserted.

### 3.4.2 Interviews

In qualitative research, interviews are one of the most relevant ways of collecting data. As pointed out by McCracken (1998: 9), "the method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world". The author suggests that in qualitative research, intensity is more important than the extension when it comes to exploring the context, and indicates the use of open-ended questionnaires in order to maximize the value of time spent with respondents.

During the fieldwork, eight depth interviews were conducted with independent fashion entrepreneurs, being three of them also responsible for initiatives that connect with other entrepreneurs, such as fairs, coworkings and collaborative stores. The informants were chosen during the first month of the fieldwork, after I was more familiarized with the context and able to identify informants that could provide relevant and diversified perspectives. Table 8 offers an overview of the interviewees.

**Table 8:** Interviewees information.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial activity</b>
Celina	32	Owns Céu Handmade, a clothing customization brand.
Rodrigo	30	Owns Sueka, a sustainable men's clothing brand; Created Modaut, an independent fashion fair in Porto Alegre.
Renata	29	Owns Esenco, a sustainable fashion brand.
Priscila	29	Created Ehco, an independent fair in Porto Alegre.
Veronica	33	Owns Mudha, a sustainable fashion brand.
Bruna	30	Owns The Wild Side Project and Pandora, both sustainable fashion brands.
Rafael	25	Created Coletivo Sauva, an independent brands collective.
Felipe	27	Organized independent fairs in the coworking A Casa.

Source: elaborated by author.

Interview guides were previously planned, but each interview evolved according to how participants brought their experiences and perspectives. Always having in mind (and written in the interview guides) the main objectives of the research, interviews started with more generalized questions, and as informants talked freely, I identified how I could delve into some issues that could provide rich information regarding the subjective meanings that guide their discourses and practices in the field of study. As highlighted by Fischer, Castilhos and Fonseca (2014: 74), interviews were conducted in order "to understand informant's understandings", once these could be indicators of the logics through which they operate. With participants' permission, all interviews were recorded, allowing me to analyze their speeches deeper when I transcribed them later.

### 3.4.3 Nethnography

This method of data collection was extremely relevant to this research, once, nowadays, absolutely all independent fashion entrepreneurs use the Internet to publicize their brands. The term "nethnography" was proposed by Kozinets (2002b) as an online marketing research technique, but other authors also label it as "virtual

ethnography”, describing it as an ethnographic variation that occurs in digital environments (MOISANDER AND VALTONEN, 2008).

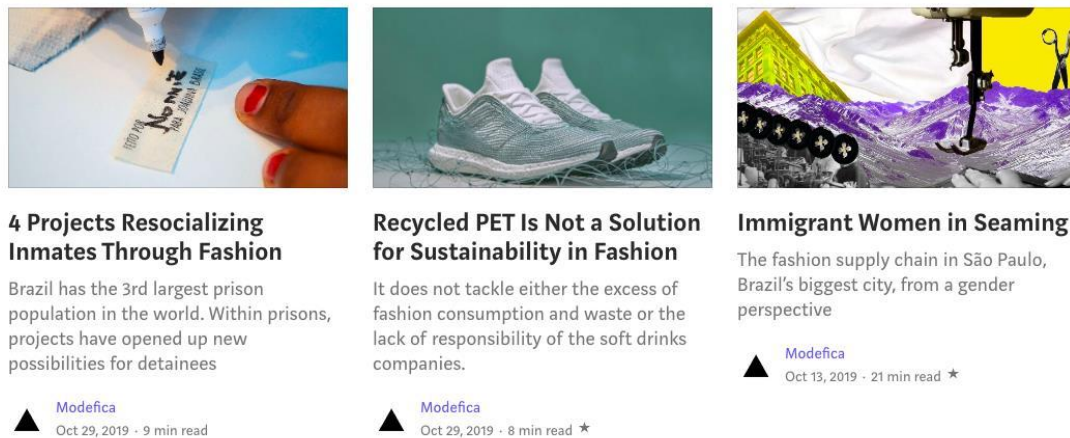
Nethnography was conducted in this research in order to observe how independent fashion entrepreneurs expose their brands in digital environments and how they interact among them and with consumers, providing several insights regarding not only what, but how they operate their businesses in digital platforms. Websites, Instagram accounts and WhatsApp conversations were the main sources of data collection through nethnography.

I created an Instagram account to follow, exclusively, accounts of independent fashion brands and initiatives in which they participate. Even though each brand or initiative has its own particularities, it was possible to observe several common factors that characterize them. By analyzing their discourses and visual resources used in digital platforms, it was possible to understand how they construct their brand images and position their businesses in the fashion market; and, along with other data collected from interviews, observations and informal conversations, it was possible to understand their motivations to do so.

Website searches also provided several insights regarding how the fashion industry is changing, and especially how independent fashion entrepreneurs seem to be playing a key role in the dynamics of this market. Websites from fashion-related social movements and fashion-related blogs were relevant data sources, once it gathers information, news, and/or perceptions and ideas of people who act as opinion leaders in this field. Figure 1, for example, shows some english-written articles from the website Modefica ([www.modefica.com.br](http://www.modefica.com.br)), which is a Brazilian platform that stresses subjects that relates fashion, beauty, feminism, environment, culture and politics, offering a wide range of articles, videos and podcasts, besides providing an e-commerce for independent fashion brands.



**Figure 1:** Articles from digital fashion platform Modefica.



Source: research diary.

As I searched for websites and Instagram accounts related to the context of the study, I found some digital communities that gather independent fashion entrepreneurs, offering them a space to connect with each other, to discuss subjects related to their segmentation and to share information and news about their businesses, like new releases and events invitations. These digital communities are usually gathered in Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and, participating in at least six of these, I collected relevant data regarding what motivates independent fashion entrepreneurs to promote changes in the fashion market; how they deal with opportunities and difficulties in their entrepreneurship journey; what are their main references within the fashion industry; and how they connect with each other and act collectively in order to strengthen their segmentation. Besides digital communities, WhatsApp groups from the coworkings which I attended were also an important data source through nethnography.

### 3.5 Data analysis process

Considering that "in ethnographic research, analysis takes place throughout the research project and is tightly connected with interpretation" (ERIKSSON AND KOVALAINEN, 2015: 159), the analysis of data happened concomitantly with its collecting. As new data was being gathered, the analysis was getting more specified, taking in view the objectives of this research. After repetitions started being

observed, I focused on more specific and detailed information that would lead me to reach my research goals.

Data from observations, informal conversations and nethnography were all gathered in files in my computer, being initially separated by topics, which contemplated "what", "how" or "why" questions regarding independent fashion entrepreneurs' discourses and practices. In each topic, I would write general observations and highlight some aspects that were considered relevant for the analysis. The same procedure was conducted in the analysis of interviews, which were transcribed in my computer right after the execution of each. As I transcribed the interviews, I wrote generalized observations in other-color texts; and after I finished each transcription, I read it highlighting the main lines that could be relevant for a future further analysis. As suggested by Fischer, Castilhos and Fonseca (2014), while analyzing the transcript interviews, I looked for patterns that would help me to address the research question of this work.

All data collected, including notes from observations, informal conversations and nethnography; transcript interviews; pictures from observations; and print screens from nethnography, were gathered in a special file in my computer. An initial analysis of each was made right after its collection, and, still during the fieldwork, as I added more data collected to the file, I would revisit the highlighted lines and the observations written previously and produce new ones.

After a certain amount of written pages and images were collected and gathered, notes and observations from the first analysis started to get repetitive, which led me to start observing further into details that would allow me to comprehend independent entrepreneurs' subjective meanings regarding their discourses that structure their social behavior in the fashion field and to investigate how these discourses and behaviors are embedded and negotiated within the field (MOISANDER AND VALTONEN, 2008). Data provided not only independent fashion entrepreneurs' perspectives *of* actions, as they approached in interviews and informal conversations; but also perspectives *in* their actions, which were identified mainly through observations (WALLENDORF AND ARNOULD, 1991).

After the nine months of data gathering, which provided over two hundred pages of field notes and transcriptions and over a hundred images, the fieldwork was finished, leading me to the next step of the analysis process. Drawing on the initial analysis of data, I reduced and organized the main notes into groups and printed

them along with some of the images collected, which allowed me to take an overview of data in a more visual way as I gathered them on a large table, paying attention to patterns, connections and divergences among them.

Considering the poststructuralist perspective adopted in the development of this research, the main final topics of analysis were coded in different categories that contemplate both independent fashion entrepreneurs' and social structures' issues, enabling the relation of these issues with the institutional lenses adopted in this work. The findings of this research are revealed in the following chapter.

## 4 RESULTS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first one describes an emerging logic through which independent fashion entrepreneurs operate in the field, highlighting some strategies they adopt in order to achieve their legitimacy and profitability goals. The second part furthers in these actor's strategies to gain or maintain legitimacy, analyzing how initiatives that connect independent entrepreneurs play a catalyst role towards market transformation.

### 4.1 Independent fashion entrepreneurs and an emerging institutional logic

Since sustainability became a subject of concern for people and organizations, provoking changes in organizational fields while challenging businesses to adapt to sustainable practices, the fashion industry has shown to be one of the most affected by the emerging demands by consumers and social movements in favor of social and environmental responsibilities. Concerns about waste reduction, size of scale production, fabric choices, fair payments to employees and the frequency of launches of new collections, for example, gained space among fashion producers as the repercussion of actions from institutional entrepreneurs in this field, such as the Fashion Revolution movement, grew among consumers.

During an interview, entrepreneur Bruna highlighted a quote that she had read: "fashion is no longer about clothes, it is about people". She claims to believe that the worldwide campaign "Who Made My Clothes?", linked to the Fashion Revolution movement, was one of the main events that started arousing people to pay closer attention to their garment consumption habits. The campaign was widely spread through social media and several events, engaging consumers, by inviting them to question fashion brands about their production systems, and producers, by challenging them to show who were the people and processes behind their operations. Online research allowed to observe the commitment of several fashion brands in participating in this movement, as exemplified in Figure 2. Fashion producers from all over the world shared photographs in their brand's social media pages holding a sign indicating who were the faces behind the workforce of their products.

Figure 2: Instagram posts from an independent fashion brand.



Source: research diary. Translation: "Who made my clothes?"; "I made your clothes".

Interviewee Verônica also referred to this movement as the trigger point that made people start looking for more responsible and transparent fashion brands, as she says:

"The Fashion Revolution is a movement that strongly brought up the question of asking who made your clothes, where it was made, how it was made.... Was the producer well paid to do it? So people are becoming more aware, valuing more the handmade and small scale productions."

In a similar way, Bruna also points out that the Fashion Revolution movement urged consumers to consider small and independent brands as an alternative to consume fashion in a more conscious way:

"The movement 'Who Made My Clothes' started to make people rethink their consumption habits, to support more handmade brand, a more conscious consumption, a more responsible brand, and not just going to the mall and buying a bunch of clothes from brands that explore people and charge too expensive for their products - or sometimes, too expensive for it. Then it started this movement of looking for local brands, with local producers, seeing what people are creating, buying a different product, even if you pay a little bit more for it... but you know that there is a 'true hand' involved in that."

The repercussion of the Fashion Revolution movement was also observed in independent fashion fairs, such as Modaut - the first independent fair focused exclusively on sustainable fashion in Porto Alegre -, as illustrated in Figure 2. Several posters were displayed at the event, seeking to stimulate consumers on practicing a more conscious fashion consumption. "Buy less, choose well and make it last" and "Fashion should be about defying the status quo", "The past is a garment that no longer fits us", and "I can, therefore I exist", says the posters in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Posters in an independent fashion fair.



Source: research diary.

Social movements, as stressed by previous researchers, are a tool to transform markets by challenging existing logics and promoting new ones (RAO ET AL., 2000; KING AND PEARCE, 2010; KJELDGAARD ET AL., 2016). They are operated by institutional entrepreneurs, whose actions may inspire other people to realize that they can also act towards the desired changes in the market - turning them into institutional entrepreneurs as well (SCARABOTO AND FISCHER, 2013). Interviewee Celina, who participated in the official Fashion Revolution events in Porto Alegre and in São Paulo with her brand, believes that the success of the movement in Brazil is also due to the speakers invited to lecture in the event, which were names of authority in the Brazilian fashion market. She says that: "after being inside this movement and hearing what people have to say, it is very difficult to make the



opposite way. I can't even think of producing a bunch of clothes just to sell a bunch of clothes because I stopped believing in it". She also claims that:

"It's a collective consciousness that started to happen, people started to have too many clothes in their closets because it was really accessible. Then for me, as someone who liked fashion and after as an entrepreneur, it doesn't make sense anymore to put more clothes in a world that already has too many clothes."

Data analysis suggests that independent fashion entrepreneurs, due to a set of market demands and opportunities, such as the emergence of the slow fashion system as an alternative to avoid further social and environmental issues, and the ease to create a micro enterprise in Brazil through the MEI (Individual Micro Entrepreneur) registration, combined with the flourishing of a post-industrial society - in which entrepreneurs of the creative industry have been considered as an economic force to develop regions (KON, 2016) -, have been active in producing fashion products and contents based on an emerging institutional logic operating in this field, acting in order to provoke changes in its institutional environment. They not only agree that the fashion market needs a transformation, showing dissatisfaction regarding how harmful this industry can be, but they also invest their sources in developing businesses that will contribute to the concretization of changes in this market. As Celina points out:

"Fashion has always been something that people craved, it was something very aspirational. Then out of nothing, it got really accessible, but all this access had a price that didn't come out of people's wallets, but from cheap labor and from the environment, so it is highly pollutant".

Data suggests that this sense of responsibility emerges from a certain pressure from social and market demands, which operate as fuels to provoke market changes. Celina also declares: "nowadays it's almost awful - I think it's awful, but anyway, for almost everybody, it's not nice to continue to buy clothes just for buying, consumerism for consumerism". As opposed to the existing fast logic in the fashion market, that relies upon a very fast pace of fashion production and consumption - which was the reason why this industry became one of the most pollutants in the world -, the emerging slow logic is based on a decrease of these rhythms, aiming to

promote an equilibrium in the fashion industry. Table 9 describes these logics characteristics.

**Tabela 9:** Fast and slow logics' characteristics.

-	<b>Fast logic</b>	<b>Slow logic</b>
Quantities of production	Large scales	Small scales
Materials	Synthetic fabrics	Reuse of fabrics or preference for natural and vegan fabrics
Suppliers	Low cost suppliers	Local suppliers
Launch of new collections	One or two new collections per month	Maximum two collections per year
Commercialization	To sell worldwide and as fast as possible	To sell through the Internet or in collaborative marketplaces
Precification	Low price pieces	Prices appropriated to the production process
Styles	Trending styles	Atemporal pieces

Source: elaborated by author.

The slow logic is based on producing fashion in small scales; with as little waste as possible, or reusing discarded fabrics; to support local businesses and suppliers; and to produce and consume pieces that will last a long time in people's wardrobes. The "conscious consumption" concept, which is embedded in slow fashion discourses, is propelled to increase consumers' awareness regarding the production processes of what they wear, how sustainable are the fabrics used, who were the people who made it; and to avoid a rampant fashion consumption, which have been the cause of several socioeconomic and environmental disequilibria.

Analysis of several data enables to observe that independent fashion entrepreneurs demonstrate a certain restlessness when it comes to working with a determined purpose to achieve through their businesses. As interviewee Bruna describes: "they want to take a risk on something, want to diversify". As brought up in informal discussions with independent entrepreneurs, it is important to observe that by the time they were growing up, they were taught, in school and by several social and environmental campaigns that were run around, that they should care for the environment, to practice waste sorting and to save water, for example. Differently



from elder generations, they also grew up in a global economic environment that allowed them “to be whoever they want, to do what they love for a living”, as an informant described. Due to the fact that the Internet has increasingly breaking communications barriers among people, and to the fact that a post-industrial society is being settled - in which the valorization of creativity and authenticity contrasts the rigidity of previous business models, resulting in new ways of production and consumption (DILELIO, 2014) -, it is possible to better understand the socioeconomic context that allowed and instigated so many independent entrepreneurs to work towards changes in the fashion market.

Data reveals that independent entrepreneurs in this context have had experiences in other enterprises in the creative industry, as freelancers or employees, but at some point they decided to act in order to provoke changes in the organizational field, what Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) describe as institutional entrepreneurs. In this sense, interviewee Verônica tells that:

"The experience she [Verônica's business partner] had there [working on a traditional fashion enterprise] helped her to identify everything she didn't want anymore. So we try to do the opposite because it's really different, we can't even compare. In these huge brands, it's a new collection every week, it comes in and goes out every week, there's not even enough time [to buy], you know. And we produce two collections per year, it's all very atemporal, that people can use for years, the fabric is good quality, the stitching is good quality... so it's all very different."

It can be observed that independent fashion brands are much more likely to adopt the slow logic to develop their business than regular retail stores. Similar to De Clercq and Voronov's (2011) comparison of profitability and sustainability logics, data suggest that independent fashion entrepreneurs base their principles mainly through the second one. Renata's description about her brands illustrates this scenario:

"We think of clothes considering who wears it rather than on fashion itself, the commercial flow. There are no winter or summer collections, the pieces continue for an undetermined time, so they have this more conscious and slow idea. The clothes are made to last, not for you next month to already have to buy another one".

In this sense, data suggests that independent fashion entrepreneurs are willing to propose an alternative way of producing and consuming fashion. Online data enables to observe that most of these actors seek to propagate conscious consumption and slow fashion ideals through design and content, reinforcing slow

fashion values; positioning themselves in the market as sustainable or socially responsible brands; and provoking consumers to rethink their consumption habits, as efforts to obtain legitimacy in the market by demonstrating a fit between their practices and society's shared norms (KATES, 2004).

As many other independent fashion entrepreneurs, Renata, for example, shares on her brand's Instagram page a series of subjects related to conscious production and consumption, reinforcing that her brand is in agreement with what has been considered, especially among actors of this segmentation of the market, to be the responsible way of producing fashion, as figure 4 shows.

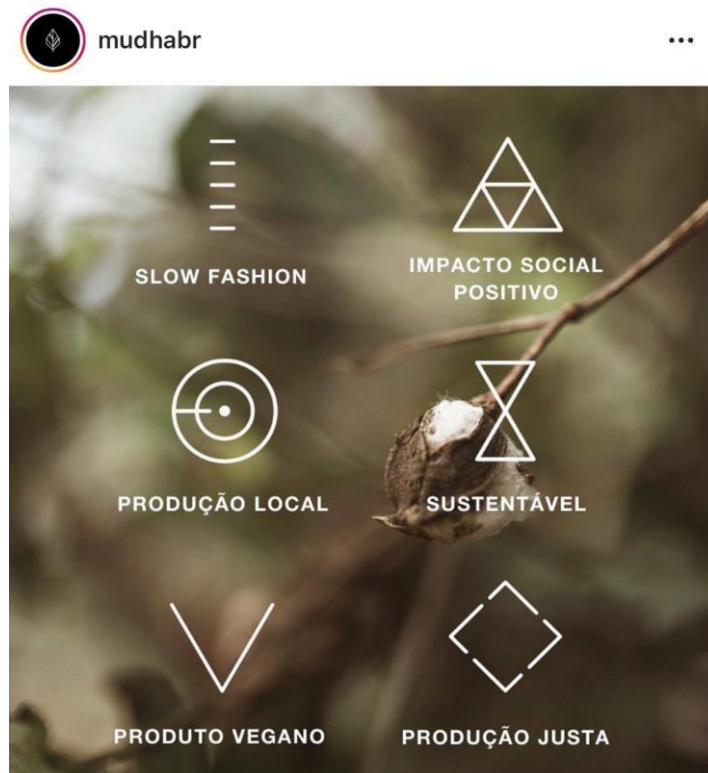
**Figure 4** :Instagram posts of an informant's brand.



Source: research diary. Translation: "Vegan clothes"; "handmade"; "atemporal clothes".

As observed by King and Pearce (2010), practices from institutional entrepreneurs, when engaged in social movements that aim to prevent markets from causing social, economic or environmental issues, may result in the proliferation of new institutional logics. By sharing slow fashion values through their businesses practices and communication skills, independent fashion entrepreneurs play an important role in market evolution, propagating an emerging institutional logic that aims to provoke changes in the field. Figure 5 shows an Instagram post of Veronica's brand, in which she shared the six pillars through which her business navigates: slow fashion, positive social impact, local production, sustainable, vegan products, and fair production.

**Figure 5:** Instagram post of an informant's brand.



Source: research diary.

Despite the efforts to propagate a new logic, independent entrepreneurs demonstrate to understand that there will not be a complete replacement of logics, but that coexisting and competing logics will take place in the market. In this way, Verônica makes her point:

"The traditional fashion will always exist because it's cheap for who buys it, in Brazil it's not everybody who has access to this sustainable and slow fashion (...), people will dress accordingly to what they can spend, but it [slow fashion] is growing fast also. It's a way that who enters, there's no way back, you know. It's something we say, that when you get to know everything that happens you don't want to buy in those [fast fashion] places anymore".

Competing logics are fuels for market evolution, and as businesses legitimacy relies upon cultural, social and material aspects that involve the institutional environment (HUMPHREYS, 2010a), it is possible to observe an isomorphism (DEEHOUSE, 1996) practiced from big fashion chains as an attempt to adaptate to the emerging market demands. Renata points out: "I see a lot of appropriation from the big brands of the small brand's truth, using a small brand discourse to keep occupying their huge space on the market". In this way, the slow and sustainable

fashion discourse also operates as a communication strategy to gain legitimacy in the market. Accordingly, Celina believes that "many of these large companies have sustainable initiatives, some of them perhaps are genuinely worried about the environment, but others are actually worried with the brand's image".

Even though big fashion chains might not actually operate through slow logic, which emerged in order to provoke changes in the institutional environment, "at least they are talking about it and making consumers think about it as well", declares Celina. She quotes about Renner and other fashion chains producing ecologic jeans garments, but she claims to know that "this is not what holds the business, it's just a marketing strategy". Even if acting through isomorphism in order to attain legitimacy on the market, these practices are noted to provoke changes in the whole fashion market, permeating all actors from this field. As the demand for a sustainable fashion grows, the demand for sustainable fabrics grows in parallel. Thus, fabric suppliers started being pressured by fashion brands to provide new options, as Verônica tells:

"I think the awareness is rising, the subject of sustainable fashion and conscious consumption is being disseminated, so people are asking for it and consequently suppliers are realizing they need to do something. Nowadays we have way more access to it. Even traditional suppliers, they have their regular line and a certified line of fabrics, so they are open to the idea also. Because if you don't change - the market is changing, so people have to walk as it goes, right... otherwise, they will no longer continue in the market".

Considering that market evolution depends on arrangements of different stakeholders (KJELLBERG AND OLSON, 2016), it is possible to note that, when operating their businesses, independent fashion entrepreneurs tend to involve different actors in the market, instigating producers, suppliers and consumers to participate in this alternative way of producing and consuming fashion, and, thus, coming across a variety of challenges and opportunities to deal with.

#### *Adaptation to commercial flows*

The comprehension of market dynamics requires attention for material aspects, such as products, infrastructures, market spaces and exchanges (MARTIN AND SCHOUTEN, 2014; SANDIKCI AND GER, 2010). In efforts to propagate a new institutional logic within the field, independent fashion entrepreneurs seek to reframe

the ways in how fashion is produced and consumed, and commercialization structures are a part of this process. "What we offer is just a tangible thing that reflects the whole process", declares Renata. She also points that "as a small business, our costs are higher than the costs of a big business, considering that these costs are divided into fewer products".

By adhering to the slow logic principles, independent fashion entrepreneurs seek to produce garments in smaller scales, with local suppliers and preferably with sustainable fabrics, which, differently from a fast and low-cost production system, tends to generate higher production costs, and, thus, higher product prices. Despite the fact that not all slow fashion brands operate through the same production systems, data suggests that their costs tend to be relatively higher when compared to big fashion business'. Celina's brand, for example, encourages the reuse of pieces that people already have in the wardrobe by customizing them, but once it's a slow and artistic process, which requires considerable amount of time, she claims that this is the reason why she can't charge very cheap for it, otherwise it wouldn't be financially viable.

Data suggests that even though independent fashion entrepreneurs demonstrate to be aware that the financial return is not immediate when it comes to independent entrepreneurship, they struggle as much as possible to maintain stick to slow logic principles when developing their commercial strategies - but sometimes, some adaptations are required in order to increase sales. Veronica, for example, made her point:

"We had to reformulate a few things. In the beginning, we used to produce clothes exclusively with linen fabrics, which is quite expensive. And not everyone bought such an expensive piece, but at the same time, they loved it. So we had to adjust, and now we use linen with cotton, which are two natural fabrics, and it enables a not so expensive final cost on the pieces. Because it is useless wanting to make everything 100% perfectly sustainable and not having the financial return we need. Otherwise, we wouldn't sell... and we need to sell"

In a similar way, Celina stresses that due to consumer's demands, she adapted her business' production, but kept struggling to be as sustainable as possible.

"It's a whole process of educating people... for example, in the beginning we wanted to use only second-hand, thrift store clothing, or clothes people already had. But then when I share [on Instagram] a picture of the customization of some piece, a jaquet for example, then people want the exact same jaquet. They don't want a similar one, or a different jaquet with

the same art, they want the exact same one. So we had to create a middle ground, then we began producing some pieces... not always we succeed in being completely sustainable, but we struggle to be as sustainable as possible and to encourage people to customize clothes they already have or to look for second-hand pieces to transform".

De Clercq and Voronov (2011) highlight that characteristics of the field and entrepreneurs' actions have an influence on their legitimacy within the market, which is achieved by adhering to a field-prescribed balance between sustainability and profitability. In this sense, data shows that independent fashion entrepreneurs, in order to increase their brand's sales, may end up linking their businesses to larger companies, which are not always congruent to the slow logic principles. Celina, for example, tells that after being invited to participate with her brand in large companies' events to offer customization workshops, she and her business partner wondered if it would be a coherent thing to do. In her words:

"In the beginning, we were completely about sustainability, until Renner wanted to hire us for a lot of money. Then, you know these doubts between ethics versus the money, the discourse versus the practice... Then as we talked, we understood that, actually, it's a way to propagate the word of customization".

Data suggests that when independent fashion entrepreneurs link their businesses to big retailers' marketplaces, which usually are not precisely congruent with the slow logic, they claim to do it both as a necessity to increase sales flows in order to attain or maintain financial sustainability in their businesses, and to conquer higher visibility among fashion consumers. For example, when arguing about why she adhered to Steal The Look, a known Brazilian fast-fashion e-commerce to commercialize her brand's products, Veronica said: "We did it because they are a reference in fashion, right?".

Similarly, Renata, during the fieldwork of these research, ended up doing something that she had first claimed that would never do: commercializing her products in a multi-brand retail store. During an interview in the beginning of the research, she said:

"That's why I really like that store in Garopaba [city in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil], because it's a lifestyle store. It's all natural, organic... the only clothes there are from Esenco [her brand], and there's also like natural toothbrushes, art pieces... and it's all from small independent brands with this conscious positioning. So there's a truth in there, when consumers enter the store they already understand what Esenco is about. But among other

fashion clothes that are produced with other proposals, it doesn't make sense for Esenco to be there. That's how I think about collaborative stores, there must be an ideal behind each space, not only to put stuff in there".

In the next months, in informal conversations, she expressed her concerns regarding financial issues in her business; and, another few weeks later, she shared, in another informal conversation, that she had decided to "surrender" to this alternative. On the other hand, Renata also pointed out that "this strategy could also be used as a new consumer touchpoint, enabling more people to have an experience with her brand and, hopefully, to get interested in a sustainable fashion".

In this sense, a confrontation of logics can be observed among independent entrepreneurs' processes and practices: while they act in order to disperse the slow logic, which proposes a slower rhythm of production and a conscious consumption in the fashion institutional environment, they might find themselves in a fine line between slow and fast logic when it comes to sales, once, as attempts to achieve an organic financial flow to maintain their operations and to generate incomes, they may end up adopting commercial strategies that are not congruent to slow logic principles. Demonstrating to understand the pros and cons of adhering to large companies' projects, Celina points out that:

"Large companies are the ones that have money. And as our work is very manual, we are unable to have a very large volume of pieces to sell. There are jackets that take two days to be customized. So I need something like this, someone who has money, such as these large companies, for us to be able to viable the business and be a brand that propagates sustainable and conscious fashion. [...] I think it's something that will take a long time to change. Our financial return is lower because it costs more to produce and we produce on smaller scales. It is harder and more expensive to produce, and unfortunately, it is more difficult to sell. Then, small brands end up adhering to these large businesses projects, but in fact, they are the ones growing".

Data shows that independent fashion entrepreneurs end up adopting commercial strategies that are not coherent to slow logic principles as a way to maintain their businesses operating on the market, which enables them to further propagate sustainable values among fashion consumers. In this sense, Rodrigo says that:

"There's no use if we keep saying many beautiful things about sustainability if, in practice, it only exists if it's also financially. And in general, most independent brands leave it for later. Man, you have to start earning money. I learned it after five years of Sueka [his brand]. There's no use in having a beautiful discourse if you don't make money to amplify this positive impact".



Data analysis suggests that, by engaging in large companies' projects to increase brand awareness, some institutional entrepreneurs also end up practicing isomorphism, once they adopt similar commercial strategies to these companies in their search for legitimation within the market (DEEPHOUSE, 1996). Figure 6, for example, shows Celina working in large companies' events.

**Figure 6:** Independent fashion entrepreneur working in large companies' events.



Source: research diary.

As reported by the own independent fashion entrepreneurs that link their businesses to large companies, they do it as a strategy to achieve higher visibility among fashion consumers and enthusiasts. Considering that legitimacy involves cultural, social, and political acceptance within their contexts (HUMPHREYS, 2010a), these entrepreneurs use isomorphism as a way to propagate not only their brands but also, and mainly, slow logic principles - which, in turn, will also help to strengthen their segmentation on the market.

However, data shows that independent fashion entrepreneurs also engage in other initiatives, created by other independent fashion entrepreneurs, that encourage institutional change through practices that propose alternative ways of commercializing and consuming fashion, furthering slow logic principles among actors in this market. These strategies are approached in the following section of this chapter.



## 4.2 Initiatives that connect independent fashion entrepreneurs as catalysts towards market transformation

The emergence of new institutional logics in markets tends to instigate changes in its institutional environment, and in order to reach legitimation within this environment, "entrepreneurs must organize collectively and mobilize their shared resources to establish the rhetorical and material infrastructure of new organizational forms" (KING AND PEARCE, 2010: 258). After identifying independent fashion entrepreneurs' characteristics and the emerging institutional logic that they seek to propagate towards market changes, the analysis of this research also delves into how these actors mobilize in collective actions in order to generate lasting institutional changes.

Taking in view that new markets don't emerge naturally, but from collective actions that mobilize the necessary resources (WEBER ET AL., 2008), it is relevant to understand how independent fashion entrepreneurs have arranged themselves to strengthen their segmentation on the market. As said by Renata: "whenever there are more people speaking, the voice is stronger. So I think these movements are important because regardless of the brands that participate, these initiatives make people look at these smaller brands".

Informant Rodrigo claims that since the beginning, as a fashion independent entrepreneur, he "had the intention not to follow conventional flows, including commercially". This urge to try new ways and to transform the organizational field, frequently identified in institutional entrepreneurs, has its source in a desire to change the status quo, and consequences of which can provoke deep changes in markets. Rodrigo, that runs the independent menswear brand Sueka since 2015, when stressing his difficulties as an independent entrepreneur regarding commercial flows, argued that "in fact, there were not many good sales channels that sold the brand principles, and specially that attracted an audience that valued those principles".

Data shows that independent fashion entrepreneurs - even the ones that practice isomorphism to achieve legitimacy - tend to look for market spaces alternatives that are congruent with their principles. "Since the beginning, I always wanted Esenco to sell more, but building it in a conscious way, being ready to do more without losing its essence and consciousness", claims Renata. However, due to

the relatively high costs of production and low frequency sales, when compared to large traditional retail companies, independent fashion entrepreneurs tend to face certain difficulties in order to keep their businesses' operation. Veronica says that:

"It is difficult, and there are people who give up soon because they think it will not work. And there are also people who don't have extra money for emergencies. In the beginning, we needed extra money to get everything right in the end, and there are people who don't".

Data suggests that financial issues and increasing demand for sales channels that are suited to slow logic principles, served as fuel for independent fashion entrepreneurs to develop and engage in alternative strategies that help them to both optimize costs and to reach more consumers. Informant Bruna, who created her brand in 2013 and in 2014 joined a coworking, says

"If there were more initiatives of this type to make young entrepreneurs, especially, get to know and help each other, it would be great. When I was opening my business, I had a million questions that people didn't know how to answer ... but after I connected with other entrepreneurs, things flowed better".

Peer firms that engage collectively and collaboratively among each other have been observed to be a major force in market evolution, increasing their overall competitiveness in the field (MACIEL AND FISCHER, 2020). Rodrigo, who beyond being an independent entrepreneur, also developed initiatives to strengthen the segmentation of these actors in the market, stresses that:

"A consensus that we have is that there is still a lack of professionalism in these brands, many of them have a great passion but lack design, lack of photo quality, lack of quality on the website, lack of management, lack of financial management... They have many needs that sometimes they don't even know. The exception is those entrepreneurs who generally come from major brands, who have had a professional career with goals, and have left to be an entrepreneur. These entrepreneurs are really standing out in comparison to other brands today. But there are still a lot of people with a lot of energy but little focus, so we tried to create solutions that would help these brands to develop".

He also argues that "we didn't learn to be collaborative, right? We were created to be competitive. So businesses are still competitive. There is no clarity on how to collaborate and to make money simultaneously". In this sense, due to the necessity and an urge to grow their businesses, data shows that independent

entrepreneurs have been working collectively, collaborating among each other in order to increase their competitiveness within the fashion market. Data analysis enabled to identify four main strategies that independent fashion entrepreneurs engage in, which are described in Table 10 and will be further detailed in the sequence.

**Table 10:** Initiatives that connect independent entrepreneurs.

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Description</b>
Independent fairs	One-day events where independent fashion entrepreneurs expose their brands.
Collaborative stores	Physical stores or digital platforms that commercializes exclusively independent fashion brands.
Coworkings	Physical workspaces shared among independent entrepreneurs.
Collectives	Groups of independent entrepreneurs

Source: elaborated by author.

An important common factor among these initiatives is collaborativeness: independent entrepreneurs bond together, sharing spaces, structures, information and knowledge among them, exponentiating their forces and networks. Thus, playing the role of catalysts towards market changes (MARTIN AND SCHOUTEN, 2014), each of these initiatives provides support through both tangible and intangible goods for independent fashion entrepreneurs to thrive in their businesses, as shown as follows.

#### 4.2.1 Collectives

Driven by the will to unite forces among independent fashion entrepreneurs, a friend of informant Celina that had recently quit her job and decided to work with sustainable fashion, gathered some friends and said "we have to do something", as told by Celina. They created a collective of exclusively sustainable fashion brands in the intention to help each other, exchanging knowledge, information, suppliers contacts, and also to support each other in whatever they need. One of the independent fashion entrepreneurs that joined the group had a physical space where she commercialized second-hand clothing, so she opened this space for the other six brands in the collective to sell their products as well, charging a small fee in order to

cover the monthly costs. Besides being a market space for these independent fashion entrepreneurs, this space is also where they gather to do meetings, sharing ideas and also pains regarding their brands, in order to give assistance to each other.

This collective in which Celina participates is an example of an initiative that was created by independent fashion entrepreneurs who, seeking to expand their businesses, connected with other brands in order to join their forces. Celina says that "the goal of the collective is not to generate profit for itself, but to help the businesses to grow", which reveals that these independent fashion entrepreneurs act as co-competitors in this context, once they cooperate with their competitors in the segment in order to provide collaborative market driving, not excluding their self-interests (MACIEL AND FISCHER, 2020).

Another informant, Rafael, created a collective of independent brands in Porto Alegre, proposing a different approach. Driven by the intention to "generate networking and connections" by providing visibility for independent entrepreneurs of the creative industry, he organizes events in which the entrepreneurs don't commercialize their products, but offer a brand experience by exposing their products along with artistic installations, and by promoting discussions about the cultural and creative scenes in the city, as shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7:** Event of an independent entrepreneurs collective.



Source: research diary.

Through the collective's Instagram page, Rafael also shares independent entrepreneurs answers to questions like "what is your biggest difficulty as an entrepreneur?", and "what is your challenge at this moment?", for example, as a way to create an approximation between entrepreneurs themselves and their public. Through communication tools and events, Rafael makes it clear that his goal is to provide visibility for these independent entrepreneurs and to incite discussions regarding the creative industry. During an interview, he argued: "I think the market is lacking independent businesses and initiatives, it favors too much the private ones. These independent initiatives are something that the public is begging to have".

Data shows that independent entrepreneurs' actions in search for legitimation rely on gathering people with common interests in order to amplify their voice and their reach on the market, providing visibility and a greater recognition and acceptance from the external environment. These two examples of collectives approached, despite operating in different ways, both were created with the intention to facilitate the legitimation of independent brands within their contexts.

#### 4.2.2. Coworkings

Coworkings are collaborative workspaces where people, that usually work as freelancers or independent entrepreneurs, can rent an individual room or work in shared spaces, as an alternative to work somewhere else other than their houses. Beyond having a workspace, these professionals may also profit from connexions that tend to emerge in these shared spaces, once they meet and socialize with other people in their daily routines.

Data shows that coworkings, especially the ones that gather creative entrepreneurs, are a fertile field for these entrepreneurs to develop their businesses, especially when it comes to networking. As stressed by informant Bruna, being in a coworking enabled her "to get to know other entrepreneurs and other business ideas, which later also generated partnerships among brands. It is a space in which we produce a lot of things". Similarly, Celina argues that "many business opportunities came from the networking I made there, many people got to know us, indicated us".

Even if working from an individual room, the professionals who work from a coworking tend to circulate around the space, either if it's to drink a coffee, smoke a cigarette, or just to chat with their peers. In this sense, informal conversations on



personal or professional subjects have been observed to be fuels for new businesses ideas among independent entrepreneurs. Data shows that these interactions also incites independent entrepreneurs to help each other on their daily professional routines, creating a collaborative atmosphere as they provide support to each other. Figure 8, for example, shows an independent fashion entrepreneur making a photoshoot of her products in the external area of a coworking, having another coworker as a model - which was a very common scene to be seen.

**Figure 8:** Independent fashion entrepreneur in a coworking.



Source: research diary.

Interestingly, the independent fashion entrepreneur that is shown in the picture is wearing a shirt from a brand of another independent fashion entrepreneur that worked in the same space. The sense of collaborativeness among independent fashion entrepreneurs in coworkings is remarkable: they don't hesitate in sharing

ideas, contacts, information and knowledge with their peers. Even being competitors in the market, cooperation seems to overcome competition in this context.

Data suggests that one of the main factors that enable a collaborative atmosphere in this context is the physical proximity among these entrepreneurs, once they share spaces and meet each other frequently. But not only the physical proximity is what bonds them: common interests and shared values among these entrepreneurs were also observed to be important key points in their relations. Figure 9 shows a shared workspace in a women-only coworking in Porto Alegre, in which several freelancers and independent entrepreneurs work together, but each of them in their own business.

**Figure 9:** Shared space in a coworking.



Source: research diary.

In order to profit from the advantages of having a physical space, independent fashion entrepreneurs also engage in promoting events or fairs in the coworkings, usually along with other independent entrepreneurs from the creative industry, like artists, designers, musicians and tattoo artists, for example. In efforts to engage their clients, expand their public and to increase sales, entrepreneurs from different segments join their forces to conquer a larger number of consumers interested in creative brands. Informant Bruna, for example, tells about when she organized an event in the coworking where she started working in at the time:

"The purpose of the event was, first of all, to let my clients know that from that moment on, I had a physical space for my brand. Also to support other



small entrepreneurs and to support the coworking. The event was made to publicize the coworking, some friend's businesses, and my brand. As criteria for inviting these entrepreneurs, I wanted them to be varied businesses, so that they complemented each other at the event".

In these events, or fairs, in coworkings, independent entrepreneurs set their products in expositors organized by themselves, usually with racks and tables. Figure 10, for example, shows the expositor of informant Celina's brand in an event in a coworking.

**Figure 10:** Expositor of an independent fashion brand in a coworking event.



Source: research diary.

Besides the creative and collaborative atmospheres that flourish in coworkings, connecting and inspiring entrepreneurs, these physical spaces also enable these entrepreneurs to professionalize their businesses, once they have somewhere else than their houses to work, to receive clients and to stock their materials and products. Celina, for example, shares that:



"Having a routine, a space to organize everything, is great. Before we did everything at home, the materials were messed up in the bag or in the car... and there we had our space to do workshops, to receive customers, to receive suppliers, an address to make deliveries... then we could better organize our business and ourselves".

Data suggests that independent entrepreneurs attend to coworkings both in order to meet and interact with other people and to benefit from a physical space with reduced costs, once they share bills and other investments to maintain and improve the space. In this sense, coworkings are observed to help independent fashion entrepreneurs in achieving legitimation within their contexts by enabling them to professionalize their business structures and to connect with other entrepreneurs from creative sectors, expanding their reach within the market.

#### 4.2.3 Collaborative stores

Willing to reach more consumers and to increase the sales, independent fashion entrepreneurs also look for collaborative stores to commercialize their products. However, as argued by Renata, "these places must have an identity and a purpose. As much as there are several brands, there has to be something in common, there has to be a common reason why they are there". This statement suggests that independent fashion entrepreneurs don't want to sell their products in "any" store, but in places where consumers are more likely to value authorial and sustainable fashion clothing.

One of the main references of collaborative stores that gathered independent fashion brands in Porto Alegre was Pandorga (represented in Figure 11), which was cited by several informants. As Veronica said, "it was a small store, in a nice neighborhood... it was a reference of authorial fashion, people knew and liked what was there". She also claims that their sales flow was great there, and it was worth it to be there even if paying the monthly fee plus 30% over each sale.

**Figure 11:** Collaborative store of independent fashion brands.



Source: research diary.

The store was created in 2010 due to the necessity of independent entrepreneurs to commercialize their products, claiming that the traditional market didn't give much space for micro and small businesses. Willing to support other independent creative entrepreneurs, they turned the space into a collaborative marketplace, joining forces and connecting creators. Veronica says that being there with her brand was a turning point for her business:

"The guys from Pandora gave us several tips, several ideas, helped us with everything regarding our products, our brand ... we didn't understand much at the beginning, you know, so they listened to us and helped us, indicating what was missing in order to sell more and better".

Despite closing their doors in the year of 2017, Pandorga is still a reference among independent fashion entrepreneurs in Porto Alegre. The concept of the store inspired other similar initiatives, both in physical and digital channels. Data suggests, though, that the marketplace issue is still a difficulty for independent fashion entrepreneurs, who struggle to attain more visibility from the larger public. Renata argues that:

"I think it all comes down to reaching people. Like, why do people buy at Zara? If you go to any big city, every corner has a Zara. Then if people want to buy some clothing from a small brand and they don't know where to find it, and not everyone likes to buy online. So obviously people are going to buy from Zara, there is one at every corner".

Data shows that, in order to overcome the lack of incentive for small businesses on the traditional market, independent fashion entrepreneurs, along with other entrepreneurs from the creative industry, have been mobilizing resources in order to promote institutional change (KING AND PEARCE, 2010). Initiatives that incentive a collaborative atmosphere among independent entrepreneurs, in this sense, are observed to increase their reach on the market, enabling them to grow mutually.

The concept of collaborative stores has been engaging several actors to support independent entrepreneurs, as data suggest. Consumers that are interested in independent fashion brands tend to look for physical or digital collaborative stores to find a variety of authorial products, and also resort to this alternative to find "different and cool stuff", as an informant argued. In this sense, data shows that these initiatives are contributing to independent fashion entrepreneurs to achieve legitimation within the market.

#### 4.2.4 Independent fairs

Fairs are not a new model of product commercialization, but they have been looked through a new perspective in the context of independent fashion. Motivated to find an alternative strategy for his and other independent fashion brands in order to increase their sales, Rodrigo identified an opportunity, as tells:

"Then one of the sales channels I identified were fairs, this concept of combining street and shopping experiences. In that moment I saw that there were several types of fairs in Porto Alegre, but none of those were specifically focused on fashion. Then I saw in there a necessity, an opportunity. Much more the need that led to the opportunity".

In 2017, Rodrigo teamed up with another independent fashion entrepreneur and created Modaut, an independent fashion fair that gathers exclusively brands that encourage sustainable fashion production and consumption. The urge to solve the

marketplace issue for their own brands, thus, led them to develop an initiative that could provide support for many others independent fashion entrepreneurs that were facing the same issues, as he stresses:

"Then we saw a huge opportunity because we noticed many other brands in Porto Alegre, and in the whole state, actually, that were going through the same issues, [...] and we still see a lot of opportunity to create this movement parallel to shopping malls or traditional marketplaces. Shopping malls and traditional stores even called us to provide commercial solutions for them, taking this concept from fairs and bringing it for malls and traditional stores. So this symbiosis of commercializing formats is already happening".

In less than two years, the independent fashion fair Modaut became a reference for sustainable fashion in Porto Alegre, gathering several independent fashion entrepreneurs in one-day events, that take place in different locations in the city. In interviews, informants claimed that participating in independent fashion fairs like Modaut led them to achieve several new clients and to achieve more visibility within the market, once these events tend to gather consumers that are interested in sustainable fashion from independent brands. As Renata argues: "I think it's a way to start reaching the public. Not in a mass audience, but it is less restricted than it would be if it weren't for the fairs". Figure 12 shows the flow of consumers in a Modaut fair.



Figure 12: Consumers in an independent fashion fair.



Source: research diary.

Several independent fashion entrepreneurs argued that the main benefit of participating in these initiatives is having a close contact with the consumers. Bruna, for example, says that she participated in several fairs "not only to be known, but also to get to know the consumers". Observations during the fieldwork enabled to notice that, when consumers approach the brands' expositors, entrepreneurs welcome them, demonstrating to be available to answer any questions, and often make a brief introduction about their brands. Consumers, in their turn, also often demonstrate interest in getting to know the brand and the entrepreneur behind it, asking questions

like "are you the producer?" and "where else can i find your products?", for example. These interactions tend to provide an approximation between consumers and producers, resignifying the value of these exchanges.

Besides interacting directly with consumers, independent fashion entrepreneurs that participate in these fairs also get to know other brands and other entrepreneurs. Data suggests that interactions among entrepreneurs is more likely to happen in smaller fairs, once they end up helping each other and chatting among them. In bigger fairs, competitiveness between them tends to be a little higher, especially if the consumers flow is high. In many cases, entrepreneurs take someone else, like friends, partners or family members, to help them during the day in the event, or at least to set their products in the expositors. In independent fairs, each entrepreneur is responsible for taking their own expositors, which usually requires a certain time and physical effort to be put in.

Considering the full engagement required to participate in fairs, several independent fashion entrepreneurs claim that despite it's great to attain higher visibility among consumers, it's not always worth it regarding the cost benefit. Rodrigo says that "many entrepreneurs launched their brands in Modaut events", and agrees that most of the entrepreneurs who participate are newcomers in the market. Data shows that for entrepreneurs who already have a certain reach of consumers and have a good sales flow through their online channels, "the fairs end up not being so positive in terms of sales", as stressed by Celina.

Attentive to independent fashion entrepreneurs demands, Rodrigo decided to create an "evolution of the fair", as he puts. He invited other five brands - including Veronica's brand - and created the Casa Modaut, which was a "collective of independent fashion brands / collaborative store / coworking / showroom / events space", as he explained. The location of Casa Modaut was, interestingly enough, in the same space where Pandorga was for seven years. Figure 13 shows a part of the space.

**Figure 13:** Collaborative store from an independent fashion brands collective.



Source: research diary.

Casa Modaut was open during one year, and now Rodrigo says that they are planning on the "2.0 format" of the initiative. Rodrigo and Veronica claim that the experience was great, but they didn't have the consumers flow they expected. Rodrigo puts that:

"It is a new market that is still growing. I see that the consumption of independent brands has grown, then the offer has also grown. but there is still an imbalance. I think there are still too many independent brands and little consumption... the current demand still doesn't support most of these projects, so I think this needs to be updated a little better".

In this sense, data shows that these initiatives that engage and connect independent fashion entrepreneurs are playing an important role in the process of

legitimation of their businesses, but entrepreneurs are still struggling to conquer more space in the market. Despite the difficulties they still face, especially regarding financial issues and visibility within larger publics, data suggests that they are improving their strategies in order to provoke an institutional change in the fashion industry, resignifying the ways in how fashion is produced and consumed.

Data shows that by mobilizing shared resources, independent fashion entrepreneurs are acting collectively towards market changes, catalyzing its reformation. In this context, entrepreneurs act as coopetitors, understanding that in order to thrive with their businesses, the whole segmentation needs to be strengthened. Further conclusions are approached in the following chapter.



## 5 CONCLUSIONS

This research has focused on comprehending how independent fashion entrepreneurs, inspired by and acting as institutional entrepreneurs; and the initiatives that connect these actors, are contributing for evolutions on the fashion market. Data collected through ethnographic methods allows to understand the process of how these actors engage in transforming the market through discourses and practices based on an emerging institutional logic in the field, reported as the slow logic.

The comprehension of historical forces, as observed by Giesler (2008) and Humphreys (2010b), plays an important role in understanding the processes of market (re)formation and institutions' legitimation. Regarding the fashion market, it is possible to observe how the socioeconomic systems in the past decades have deeply influenced how organizations operate and how people consume fashion. The fast fashion system, operated by large fashion chains, on one hand tuned fashion more accessible for consumers, satiating their desire to wear a variety of garments as they paid cheap prices. But on the other hand, this led the fashion industry to become one of the most pollutants in the world, instigating social movements to act towards changes in this field. Movements such as the Fashion Revolution, in addition to the array of sustainability projects and campaigns that have run in the last years, demonstrated to be highly relevant in the spread of new institutional logics, de-institutionalizing existing beliefs, norms and values in societies and institutionalizing new ones (RAO ET AL., 2000).

In these circumstances, independent fashion entrepreneurs, as newcomers in the market, engaged in adopting sustainable practices and discourses in their businesses - otherwise they wouldn't reach legitimacy within the context, once the fast logic system is nowadays considered to be harmful to societies and for the environment. In this sense, by acting as institutional entrepreneurs in the fashion market, independent fashion entrepreneurs adopt the slow logic not only in order to disperse new norms and beliefs within the market, but they also do it in search of their businesses' legitimation, demonstrating a social, cultural and political fit in society (HUMPHREYS 2010a, 2010b).

Changes and transformations in markets are never instantaneous, it takes time and energy from actors to establish new norms or to adapt to them. In this sense, it is

possible to observe a confrontation of logics in the fashion market. On one hand, the fast logic is what most consumers are used to: they get a variety of fashion pieces for low prices, and through this system, organizations attain high profits. On the other hand, consumers and producers of the fashion industry seem to be aware of the environmental issues that the excessive production and consumption of fashion may provoke. In this context, independent fashion entrepreneurs struggle to adapt to both sustainability and profitability demands, operating their businesses through slow logic principles and facing the lack of openness to independent initiatives on the market.

The discourse of slow fashion was also adopted by several large, traditional fashion retailers. Through isomorphism (DEEPHOUSE, 1996), big companies have created strategies to follow up to new market demands in order to maintain their legitimacy in the field, which demonstrates that they are also working to adapt to the slow logic that has emerged in the past years. Even if not actually basing their practices through slow logic principles, “at least they are talking about it”, as said by one of the informants in the research. While traditional fashion retailers struggle to adapt to sustainability demands, independent fashion entrepreneurs struggle to adapt to profitability demands, as shown in collected data, once their sales flow might not be enough for the financial sustainability of their business, taking in view their relatively higher production costs and lower market reach.

Some independent fashion entrepreneurs, as shown by data, end up adopting commercialization strategies linked to larger fashion companies in attempts to increase sales, claiming to do it as a way to maintain their business operations and to keep propagating slow logic principles in the fashion market. In this sense, these independent fashion entrepreneurs practice isomorphism in order to increase their legitimacy within the context (DEEPHOUSE, 1996).

Data showed that independent fashion entrepreneurs also engage in developing, or connecting to, alternative commercialization strategies that aim to promote conscious consumption among societies, concretizing the market transformations they want to establish. By mobilizing shared resources, these actors act collectively, joining forces and struggling to increase the acceptance of the emerging logic within the institutional environment (KING AND PEARCE, 2010). These initiatives that gather independent fashion entrepreneurs, such as independent fairs, collaborative stores, coworkings and brands collectives, as investigated in this research, were observed to help in their search for legitimation by connecting and approximating

these actors, generating valuable networks as they share information, knowledge and ideas among each other, and increasing their visibility within the market, once, "whenever there are more people speaking, the voice is stronger", as said by informant Renata.

These findings lead to observe that, despite being "independent" entrepreneurs, they still depend on each other to increase their acceptance within the field, especially due to the fact that they are struggling to establish a new institutional logic in the fashion market. As discussed in prior market researches, collective actions from consumers, marketers, or both, are observed to be fuels in the establishment of new organizational forms (KATES, 2004; THOMPSON AND CONSKUNER-BAILI, 2007; HUMPHREYS, 2010a, 2010b; GIELSER, 2012; SCARABOTO AND FISCHER, 2013; MARTIN AND SCHOUTEN, 2014; KJELDGAARD ET AL., 2016; MACIEL AND FISCHER, 2020). Accordingly, the findings of this research show that collective action from independent fashion entrepreneurs are observed to increase their chances of being legitimated within the market, once they mobilize shared resources to thrive with their businesses and to further the propagation of the slow logic, attaining higher visibility in the market and increasing their sales flow through alternative marketplaces. In addition, drawing on Martin and Schouten's (2014) concept of consumption-driven market emergence, and Maciel and Fischer's (2020) contributions on collaborative market driving, this work proposes that the initiatives that connect independent fashion entrepreneurs play a catalyst role towards market evolution, suggesting that these initiatives are keys for a collaborative-driven market reformation.

As managerial implications, this work's findings also contribute to independent entrepreneurs on their search for legitimation within the market. Taking in view the barriers regarding the financial sustainability of the independent business, which tends to originate from weak visibility in the market and inconstant sales flow, it is proposed that collaboration networks between more actors, beyond independent entrepreneurs, interested in strengthening the local production and the legitimation of the slow logic, could be developed. Creating collaborative networks with know-hows and perspectives of different stakeholders, such as suppliers, consumers, journalists, and digital influencers, for example, could strengthen the mutual support and improve the development of production and commercialization strategies that stimulate both local economy and sustainable and conscious consumption practices. For that, it is

necessary that actors interested in legitimizing these practices in the market gather along and plan strategic actions in order to amplify the collaboration among different actors and invite other actors to contribute to these changes. Regarding the initiatives investigated in this work, each may provide different advantages in relation to network, visibility and sales, as described in Table 11.

**Table 11:** Managerial implications for independent entrepreneurs.

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Strengthening the network</b>	<b>Attaining higher visibility</b>	<b>Attaining higher profits</b>
<b>Coworkings</b>	Frequent contact with other independent entrepreneurs	Reach of other independent brands' public	Monthly shared workplace costs
<b>Independent fairs</b>	Consumer direct sales	Reach of larger audiences	High amount of direct sales
<b>Collectives</b>	Meetings to discuss the market	Realization of collective events	Strategies for sharing costs among brands
<b>Collaborative stores</b>	Relationship with other brands	Reach of larger audiences	Sales increase

Source: elaborated by author.

Independent entrepreneurs of any market segmentation may be favored by creating, or participating in, initiatives that connect their businesses with other independent brands. Each type of initiative may offer specific advantages, with different strategies for independent brands to thrive within the market while collaborating along with other independent entrepreneurs.

Based on this work's findings, future studies can be conducted to investigate the role of consumers in the establishment of slow logic principles in the fashion field, looking further into how they cooperate - or not - in the propagation of the emerging institutional logic in the fashion market. Considering the relevance of this subject in the comprehension of market dynamism, further attention can be given to the role of other actors in this field.

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