

How social media capsized the fashion show

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Date : September 1, 2016



With a 40-foot ferris wheel, carousel, carnival games and cotton candy, **Tommy Hilfiger's** "Tommy Pier," a carnival-themed party and fashion show, will play out as an Instagram fashion influencer's fantasy. Two-thousand tickets will be passed out to fill the pier during the Sept. 9 event in the Manhattan Seaport, half of which are for the public. It's one of the biggest consumer invitations to a fashion show: Last fall, **Givenchy** made 800 tickets available.

The draw of the event will be model **Gigi Hadid**, premiering the launch of her first clothing collection for the brand, Tommy x Gigi, on the runway, which will be streamed live on Tommy.com and Vogue.com. The collection will go on sale online and in stores that night.

Tommy x Gigi at Tommy Pier, for all its pomp and public flair, stands in direct contrast to another Hilfiger event, happening later this month: Hilfiger will show his women's ready-to-wear spring collection privately, to long-lead press and buyers, by appointment only.

"Designers are now having to build **brands**," said **Laurie DeJong**, the owner of LDJ Productions, New York Fashion Week's production company. "It's no longer only about the color or the shape of the clothes, it's the overall world of the **brand**. The traditional runway show is giving way to that for a lot of fashion **designers**."

Tommy Hilfiger's approach to September fashion week represents the split personality that **brands** are forced to adopt in response to pressures brought on by **social** media and see-now-buy-now consumerism. The fashion show now has to somehow provide different things to two very different groups of people. It has to be a source of entertainment and engagement for the public, as well as present a comprehensive new collection of product to the buyers and the press that critiques them.

This season, **designers** have to decide how to present their collection — at a party, a carnival,

on a traditional catwalk — and to whom, the customer or the buyers. The weight of those decisions is apparent as **brands** scramble to see what works best.

“It would be great if there was some guidance, or a top-line view,” said Aliza Licht, former svp of global communications at DKNY. “It’s a total panic right now.”

Fashion shows as publicity stunts

The purpose of the fashion show has been drastically changed by social media, and as a result, **designers** are facing a free-for-all when it comes to presenting their new collections, a standard activity that used to be straightforward.

In January, the CFDA partnered with the Boston Consulting Agency to evaluate the purpose of New York Fashion Week. [In the report](#), which was largely inconclusive, the CFDA laid out what was the initial purpose: “For **designers** to show their upcoming collections, for press to review those collections and for buyers to place orders.”

But, things have changed. Specifically, technology has put the fashion show in front of millions of viewers. Live streams, **Instagram** posts and **Snapchat** stories have blown the doors open.

“What was once a trade event is now in front of a mass audience in real time,” said **CFDA president Steven Kolb** in the report. “That amplifies excitement.”

The fashion show has been evolving to be more eye-catching, engaging and headline-making in the years since every editor in the audience came equipped with an iPhone and a personal platform to share the runway. Chanel’s themed shows have sent models in elbow-length gloves and pink tweed coats down recreated grocery store aisles and airport terminals. Givenchy, Kanye West and more have allotted seats for the public during past fashion shows. Tommy Hilfiger, leading up to Tommy’s Pier, flooded a catwalk with a few inches of water and sent models down football fields in past years.

With this year’s carnival, Hilfiger has raised the bar in an effort to drive more social engagement and get more consumer attention.

“Of course, it’s going to get a gazillion impressions,” said Licht. “At the end of the day, these types of thing are press stunts. It’s brands jumping through hoops to get attention. If they can sustain it, and have the budget for that, that’s great, but it’s rare. And we don’t know if it will actually drive sales.”

Stepping back from the spotlight

Some **designers** aren’t interested in making a game of one-upmanship out of fashion week.

Kate Spade isn’t hosting a fashion show or presentation this year, instead inviting press by appointment only. In past seasons, the brand has hosted presentations in the form of parties

with celebrities in attendance and the clothing as the centerpiece. Editors seeing the collection will be discouraged from sharing full looks on **social** media until next February. Instead, Kate Spade will focus its social presence on the fall collection that's on sale now.

Derek Lam will be going the same route, showing his collection personally to press and buyers only. Even designer and CFDA chairman **Diane Von Furstenberg**, who hosted a model-packed, **Instagram-perfect** party for her fall/winter collection in February, is stepping away from the consumer-facing collection premiere, and taking private appointments.

"For the **brands** that play the game of attracting the consumer, when things hit the store in spring, they'll feel like old news, even though they're not," said **Rony Zeidan**, founder of luxury branding agency RO NY. "The private appointment is going back to the traditional — let's communicate through the press, and that's it. Let's not talk to the customer. If the product isn't available in the store, don't Instagram about it. Don't create a false desire."

While Zeidan said that the private appointment frees up the brand's social media story to focus on the products that are currently available for that season, this strategy runs the risks of sitting out from a high-profile moment.

"The consumer is hearing and seeing things on social too early, on one hand," said Licht. "But if you don't have a presence during fashion week, you almost don't exist. It's important to have a share of voice during NYFW, or someone else will be happy to engage the customer for you."

"It's been overwhelming"

With so many variables at play, there isn't one new form of fashion show. The CFDA came to that conclusion in its report, writing, "Ultimately, it is up to the brands to decide what works best for them, and the CFDA will support **designers** as they experiment and define what is right for their collections."

That lack of industry-wide guidelines is more apparent this season than ever before. It's unlikely that all **brands** will find themselves following the same formula around fashion week again. According to Zeidan, **brands'** shows will be dependent on whether or not a company plans to buy into a see now, buy now business approach, and to what degree. It also depends on a brand's budget and social media strategy.

"Fashion is all about change," said LDJ Productions' DeJong. "It's been overwhelming, and we've spent a lot of time discussing options, but it's good that there's now no limit to what you can do."

This article first appeared in www.glossy.co