

PLÁSTICO BY ALEXANDER WANG

As the rising Brazilian retail market turns an eye towards eco-friendly products in the digital age, American Ready-to-Wear label Alexander Wang must infiltrate this marketplace through the launch of a sustainable, rave-inspired swimwear line entitled PLÁSTICO.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT



INTRODUCTION

In an age of economic uncertainty and digital connectivity, radical shifts in the United States' production and retail models offer apparel labels novel opportunities for international expansion. In the first half of the 20th century, most apparel production occurred in the US. Offshore production, however, usurped domestic in the latter half of the century with 5% offshore production in 1960 skyrocketing to nearly 95% by the new millennium (Works, 2018). The recent rising consumer power in leading foreign production centers, such as China or India, however, have shifted apparel companies' focus from a search for overseas labor bases to overseas retail opportunities. The emergence of global online communities, from social media platforms to digital marketplaces, facilitate increased efficiency and personalization of marketing towards overseas demographics while reducing costs of global transactions (*BoF*¹ & McKinsey & Company, 2018). As one case in point, Latin America has undergone one of the largest shifts in the industry. As apparel expenditure skyrockets and digital influence reigns supreme, Brazil, in particular, is the next key market for international expansion (Sorlini, 2015).

Omnichannel fashion companies must adapt quickly and efficiently in order to successfully infiltrate foreign markets. For instance, Matchesfashion.com, a luxury, London-based e-commerce group, and Stella McCartney, a RTW² apparel label, utilize digital connectivity and sustainable marketing, respectively, to penetrate international markets. Perhaps the most iconoclastic apparel company that seeks further global expansion is American private label Alexander Wang (Abnette, 2015). Notorious for subverting industry conventions of

¹ *BoF* is an industry acronym for *The Business of Fashion*.

² "RTW" is an industry acronym for "ready-to-wear," defined as "made for the general market and sold through stores rather than made to order for an individual customer; off the rack" (Oxford, 2018).

branding and product assortment, AW³ will appeal to Brazil's affluent, rave-oriented Millennial consumer, a rapidly expanding demographic seeking both luxury labels and eco-friendly apparel. In order to infiltrate this untapped market, AW will unite Matchesfashion.com's e-commerce experience with Stella McCartney's socially responsible branding through the creation of a sustainable, rave-inspired swimwear line entitled PLÁSTICO.

MARKET RESEARCH: Matchesfashion.com and Stella McCartney

Situated in Wimbledon, London, Matchesfashion.com utilized digital connectivity to penetrate a foreign marketplace, growing from one brick-and-mortar boutique into one of the largest e-commerce groups in three decades. Founded in 1987, Matchesfashion was the first multi-brand boutique vendor in Britain to offer selections from luxury powerhouses, such as Prada, Versace, and Dolce & Gabbana. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, the founders, Ruth and Tom Chapman, transitioned to online retail to attract international markets while cutting costs, rebranding the label as Matchesfashion.com. (Paton, 2017). As current CEO Ulric Jerome states, MF⁴ combines “retail, culture, [and] broadcast, with... an opportunity of connecting and inspiring the customer” regardless of location (Berezhna, 2018).

MF entered the US marketplace by communicating its rare product assortment through a digitally curated yet personalized experience. As Jerome explained to *BoF*, “The more the industry grows, the more the opportunity of online grows, the more the customer wants to have a one-to-one conversation” (Berezhna, 2018). *MF* cultivates this conversation through editorial content on its website and app, a chatbox that assists customers in shopping choices, and *The*

³ From this point on, Alexander Wang will be referred to as AW for the sake of brevity.

⁴ From this point on, Matchesfashion.com will be referred to as MF for the sake of brevity.

Style Social section, which allows users to chat about their selections. These digital resources have garnered the attention of affluent luxury consumers in the US, as they showcase MF's selection of high-end brands. The company shared with *BoF* that the US quickly became MF's largest consumer base, driving its growth to 54 percent year-after-year (Berezhna, 2018).

Matchesfashion.com's exponential growth in the past decade illustrates that digital connectivity is critical to global expansion. After infiltrating the US market, in its 2017 annual sales report, *MF*⁵ reported a 61% revenue rise, reaching a six-fold increase in its earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization. The company also reported a total of 587,000 euros in sales in 2016 averaging over 500 euros per sale. The company now manages over five hundred employees, offering apparel from four hundred and fifty designers (Paton, 2017).

While *MF* capitalizes upon digital connectivity to reach an international audience, Stella McCartney implements sustainability across the value chain, even on the retail level, to curate a loyal customer base overseas. Differentiating herself from her renowned parents, creative director Stella McCartney pioneered sustainability in the high-fashion sphere by founding her eponymous label in 2001 in partnership with luxury conglomerate Kering (Keinan and Crener, 2016). *SM*'s⁶ mission statement articulates:

We are agents of change.... Each decision we make is a symbol of our commitment to defining what the future of fashion looks like... from never using leather or fur... to utilising cutting edge technologies... protecting ancient and endangered forests and measuring our impact with ground-breaking tools. (Stella McCartney, 2018)

⁵ From this point on, Matchesfashion.com will be referenced as "MF" for the sake of continuity.

⁶ From this point on, Stella McCartney will be referred to as "SM" for the sake of brevity.

SM's sustainable brand image appeals to international Millennial consumers, the most ethics-oriented and active consumer cohort of the decade (Keiser, Vandemar, & Garner, 61). For instance, as China began implementing environmental regulations on a federal level in 2014, SM catered to China's Millennials by opening three free-standing locations (Song, 2018). Furthermore, in 2017, SM opened stores worldwide⁷ featuring their newly-implemented brick-and-mortar retail strategy: eco-friendly fixtures, such as wood furnishing, recycled packaging, green energy, and LED lighting. As SM CEO Frederick Lukoff explained to *WWD*,⁸ the retail strategy "allows our current and future customers further accessibility to the SM brand... I really wanted our customers to... not only respond to the product but also to respond to its environment" (Iredale, 2017). Evidently, SM incorporates sustainability into every tier of the supply chain to solidify their image. The brand currently operates fifty-one freestanding stores in over seventy-seven countries. Additionally, it features women's and men's RTW, childrenswear, sportswear, lingerie, fragrance, accessories, and a life-long collaboration with Adidas that resulted in custom designs for the 2012 olympic team (*BoF*, 2018). SM achieved this rapid expansion by appealing to responsibly-minded, fashion-forward consumers across the globe. Thus, as *McKinsey & Company* predicts in its Marketing and Sales Report, a sustainable business model is key to reaching tomorrow's customer (Keller, 2014).

ALEXANDER WANG EXPANSION

Omnichannel apparel company AW company must merge MF and SM's usage of digital connectivity and sustainability as a vehicle for expansion. Founded in 2005 by Creative Director

⁷ The aforementioned stores are located in New York, Florence, California, and Paris.

⁸ *WWD* is an industry-acronym for *Women's Wear Daily*.

Alexander Wang, the private label already employs over three hundred employees and generates about \$150 million in revenue annually through over seven hundred points of sale. Currently operating five brick-and-mortar stores,⁹ twenty partner stores abroad, and a bustling e-commerce website, AW strives to utilize digital connectivity and groundbreaking product lines to drive further expansion (Amed, 2016). Brazil's luxury market, in particular, will be a key retail opportunity, as digital connectivity and sustainability are growing influencers in its marketplace.

While AW has established itself as a prominent RTW label in the US, it has yet to infiltrate the Latin American market. Latin America's apparel industry is currently worth \$160 billion; clothing and footwear expenditure is forecasted to increase at a compound annual growth rate of 7.2% over the next five years, which is roughly congruent with Asia's growth rate of 7.8% (Young, 2017). Thus, Latin America's total fashion consumption will surpass \$7.2 million by 2021, offering domestic retail opportunities to new international groups (Statista, 2018).

Due in part to its larger consumer power, Brazil, in particular, reigns supreme in Latin America's luxury market, accounting for over 40% of Latin America's luxury expenditure in 2018. According to *Bain & Company*, consumers in San Paolo alone spent \$2 billion in luxury goods in 2017. Brazil's success in the luxury realm can also be attributed to its self-contained infrastructure. For instance, *Vogue Brazil*, led by Editor-in-Chief Sylvia Roger, functions autonomously from Karla Martinez' *Vogue Latin America*.

Brazil's vast variety of luxury retail giants now seek to expand their portfolio. For instance, retail group *Iguatemi*, situated at seventeen locations throughout Brazil, just added

⁹ The aforementioned stores are located in New York, London, Beijing, and Shanghai.

Valentino and *Fendi* to their portfolio. The rise in luxury retail opportunities in Brazil is due in part to the country's interest in foreign labels; many even travel to the US annually for earlier opportunities to purchase US luxury labels (Young, 2017). Thus, the US luxury apparel market has helped to shape the affluent Brazilian consumer's taste, priming them for AW products.

PLÁSTICO: THE PRODUCT LINE



PLÁSTICO Mood Board

Heralded by *WWD* as “The Energizer,” AW is notorious for provocative styles (Iredale, 2015), but has not yet explored the swimwear industry; thus, PLÁSTICO would be an ideal new product line that remains loyal to the brand image. According to market research, the swimwear market in North and Latin America is the largest across the globe; Currently growing at a compound annual growth rate of over 6%, it is estimated to reach 10 billion USD by 2019. The US and Brazil, in particular, are at the forefront of the industry (Technavio, 2016).

Affluent Millennials in Brazil will embrace AW swimwear because of their pervasive demand for beach attire and body-positive ideology. Due in part to the beachscape in Brazil, Brazilian women historically gravitate towards more exposing apparel. The country is notorious for pioneering bikini miniaturization, Brazilian waxing, and utilizing masking tape to achieve full-body tans, maintaining consumer appeal for provocative apparel to this day. Additionally, according to *WGSN*, the Brazilian culture is defined by unrestricted celebration of size and form (Martellini, 2017), generating further market opportunity for AW’s skin-baring aesthetic.

Furthermore, the festival-oriented mindset of this demographic aligns with AW’s brand image as a celebrator of party culture. Cross-cultural consumer psychographics illustrate that the Brazilian Millennial demographic’s skyrocketing apparel, entertainment, and alcohol expenditure is due in part to its global music festivals, including Tomorrowland Sao Paulo, Rio Music Carnival, and Ultra Brasil (*WGSN*, 2014). This is an ideal market for AW’s “ultracool brand synonymous with street grit, irreverence, the spirit of youth and spontaneity” (Iredale, 2015).

While Brazil’s swimwear industry is bustling, it seeks to expand its product offerings as consumers’ taste shift away from quintessential Brazilian designs, generating further market

opportunity for PLÁSTICO. As conversations of gender-non-conforming identities grow increasingly pervasive, consumers seek more athletic and androgynous-inspired designs, rather than classic Brazilian design elements, such as tropical palettes, feminine silhouettes, and knits. *WGSN* reveals that the new swimwear companies represented during festival and carnival seasons in 2017, a key sales period for swimwear companies in Brazil, were unisex (Fenton, 2018). Thus, AW, a label recognized for its androgynous athleisure, will bring back edgy yet sporty silhouettes from F/W '18¹⁰ and S/S '18¹¹ collections in PLÁSTICO.¹²

As Brazilian Millennials gain increased knowledge of the supply chain and larger purchasing power, they seek more eco-friendly apparel. For instance, in 2018, the Brazilian branch of the C&A Foundation, *Instituto C&A*, launched a global campaign inviting proposals for systematic changes in the country's garment production (C&A Foundation, 2018). While sustainability has become pervasive in political debate in the US, Brazil is not yet saturated with sustainable, high-fashion options. AW can cater to this demographic's appetite for both luxury and ethicality through the launch of PLÁSTICO, which will be produced domestically in limited quantities, thus cutting resource usage while bolstering the local economy. Additionally, it would avoid the high import duties on apparel in Brazil (Kunz and Garnde, 2016, p.332).

A sustainable product line would be in line with AW's brand image, for many previous collections focused on politicized topics. For instance, in 2014, Wang released a black beanie embroidered with "P6" in stark white to promote the Principle 6 campaign, making a serious

¹⁰ "F/W '18" is an industry acronym for the Fall and Winter season in 2018.

¹¹ "S/S '18" is an industry acronym for the Spring and Summer season in 2018.

¹² See Mood Board for development of these pieces into PLÁSTICO.

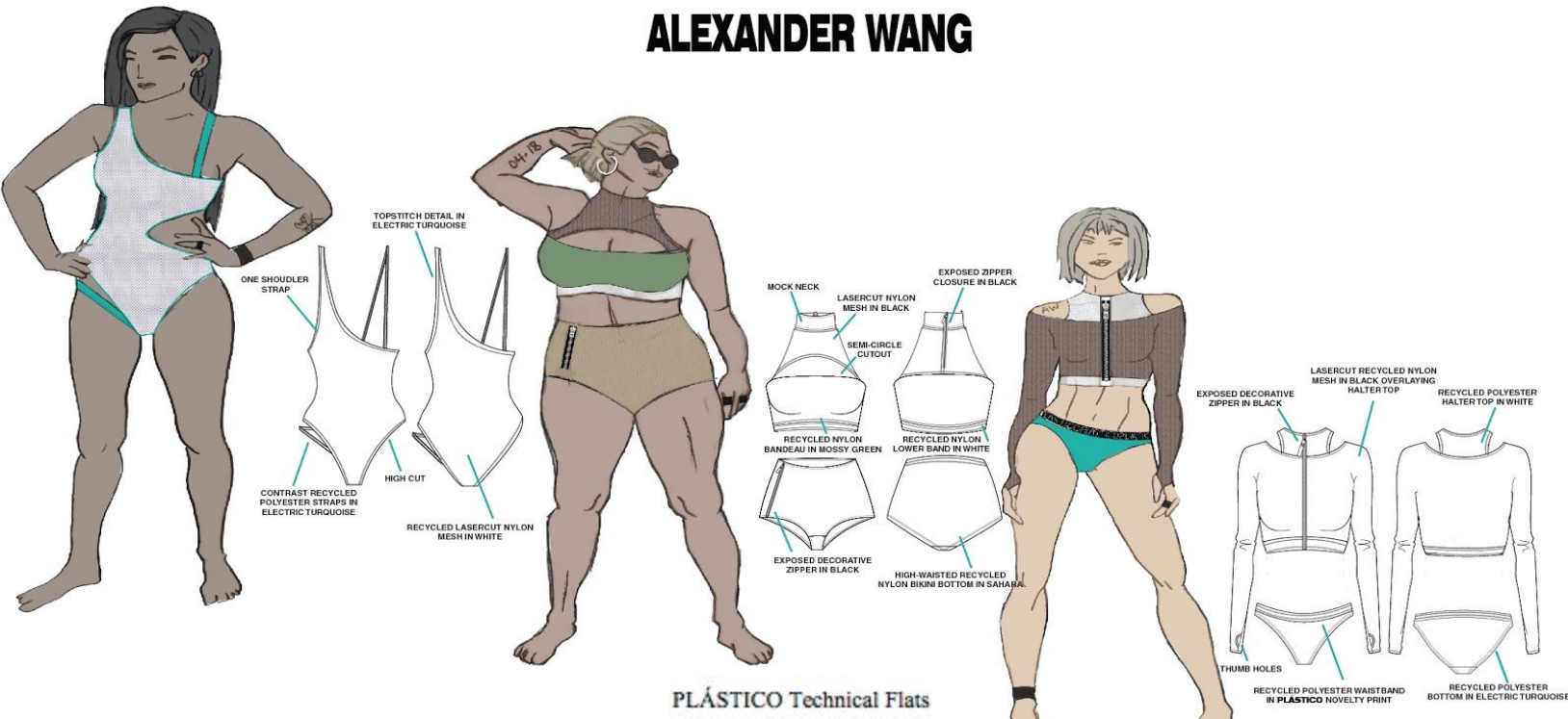
discussion attractive and marketable¹³ (Canlas, 2014). Furthermore, in their S/S '17 collection, AW released a surprise collaboration with Adidas centered on the notion of “Clothes [as] a hindrance. Whatever your shape or size or gender, less is best. The body rules. Celebrate skin”. The gender neutral, all-black collection, heralded by *WWD* as a novel attempt at “democratizing fashion,” featured a flipped Adidas logo that sought to subvert brand convention (Yotka, 2017). Recently, AW’s F/W ‘18 collection fused traditional Chinese attire with 1970s moto-rock, focusing on the Chinese immigrant identity (Schneier, 2018). Thus, AW has dabbled in various political topics, including LGBTQ+ rights, gender, and race, but has yet to contribute to the sustainability discussion, opening an ideal opportunity for this product assortment.



PLÁSTICO Product Line

¹³ The Principle 6 Campaign, a series of Olympic protests during Sochi’s 2014 olympics, protested Russia’s anti-gay laws. P6 refers to the sixth principle of the olympic charter, which prohibits any form of discrimination in the Olympics.

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FABRIC, PRINT, AND COLOR BOARD



LASERCUT RECYCLED NYLON MESH. COLORWAYS: BLACK, WHITE

BREATHABLE, SWEAT-WICKING, LIGHT, & FLEXIBLE



RECYCLED PVC VINYL. COLORWAYS: BLACK, ELECTRIC TURQUOISE

STURDY, GLOSSY, WATER-RESISTANT



100% RECYCLED POLYESTER. COLORWAYS: WHITE, ELECTRIC TURQUOISE

ELASTIC, TEAR-RESISTANT



100% RECYCLED NYLON. COLORWAYS: SAHARA, WHITE, MOSSY GREEN

TENACIOUS, STRETCHY, RESISTANT, FORM-FLATTERING

|| COLORWAYS ||

WANG

DOWNTOWN RIO BLACK

WANG

BELLO HORIZANTE ELECTRIC TEAL

WANG

PLÁSTICO WHITE

WANG

MOSSY GREEN

WANG

SAO PAULO SAHARA

STICO PLÁSTICO
STICO PLÁSTICO
STICO PLÁSTICO
STICO PLÁSTICO
STICO PLÁSTICO
STICO PLÁSTICO

100% RECYCLED POLYESTER. "PLÁSTICO" NOVELTY PRINT

BANGWANG B.
BANGWANG B.
BANGWANG B.
BANGWANG B.
BANGWANG B.
BANGWANG B.

100% RECYCLED POLYESTER. "WANG BANG" NOVELTY PRINT

SKINS. PELES.
SKINS. PELES.
SKINS. PELES.
SKINS. PELES.
SKINS. PELES.

100% RECYCLED POLYESTER. "SKIN. PELES" NOVELTY PRINT



PLÁSTICO COLOR SELECTION

According to LATAM's forecast on Latin America's trending color palettes for the S/S '20 season, neutrals and mossy green are a top swimwear color palette, as apparel companies are shifting towards a sustainability-centric color story. At the same time, graphic "Light magic" hues, such as ultra-violet and teal, are also replacing Brazil's tropical color story, especially in activewear. *WGSN* predicts that electric turquoise, especially, will be a trending color, as blues historically have commercial appeal (Boddy, 2018). Inspired by these emerging trends, AW's color palette will feature black, white, sahara, mossy green, and electric turquoise, thus fusing graphic athleticism with a sustainability-oriented neutrals.

PLÁSTICO FABRIC SELECTION

To ensure environmental-consciousness on a micro-level, PLÁSTICO will be comprised of eco-friendly materials. The collection will feature recycled PVC vinyl; recycled polyesters; produced from PET bottles recycled nylon, produced from post-industrial waste fibers; and laser-cut nylon meshes. Due to its protein fiber content, nylon is the sole synthetic fiber that can absorb natural color. Thus, all the nylon and nylon blends will be dyed naturally from food waste dyes in Brazil: onion skin, walnut hulls, and coffee dyes will be used to create sahara-toned textiles, and wheatgrass dye will be used to create the mossy green and turquoise.

PLÁSTICO PRINT SELECTION

To capitalize upon Brazil's appetite for foreign labels, PLÁSTICO will feature a select collection of novelty prints that play with the Wang logo. AW cleverly branded their name as a hype-slogan long before other apparel labels' commodification of their logos, such as Gucci's

#TFWGucci meme campaign in 2017 or Balenciaga's recent baseball hat line. AW's carefully curated slogans evoke brand lifestyle messages rather than a sense of elitism (Amarca, 2017). For instance, supermodels such as Bella Hadid and Kaia Gerber wore tiaras studded with slogans such as "WANGOVER" at the S/S '18 collection show (Phelps, 2017).¹⁴ Thus, AW cleverly fused a world-class model line-up with overt brand references in order to commodify their image. Additionally, in June 2018, AW released "Alexander Wang X Trojan," a capsule collaboration featuring a print that reads "PROTECT YOUR WANG" to raise awareness of HIV and aids in the LGBTQ+ community (Okwodu, 2018). AW utilized their logo to shed light upon a tabooed subject, while still curating their aesthetic. Furthermore, in July, 2018, AW released a souvenir capsule dedicated to Chinatown (Phelps, 2018). The products featured a print of logos featuring the surname Wang, in addition to an exaggerated badge that read "MADE IN CHINA." Through ironically flaunting their overseas production, AW subverted negative connotations associated with offshore production and promoted an appreciation for the designer's culture.

Thus, PLÁSTICO will continue logo commodification through three tongue-in-cheek prints, "SKIN. PELES¹⁵," "WANG BANG," and "PLÁSTICO GANG,¹⁶" as ironically overt and provocative references to PLÁSTICO's themes of sustainability and body-positivity.

Communicating PLÁSTICO to the Consumer: Social Media Marketing Plan

In previous seasons, AW's marketing material featured celebrity endorsement or counterculture branding. For instance, AW prepared for the launch of "Made in China" with an Instagram campaign on immigrant stories. The campaign featured elderly Chinatown neighbors,

¹⁴ See Figure 1.

¹⁵ Portuguese for "skin."

¹⁶ Portuguese for "plastic."

utilizing the ironic incongruity of senior models for marketing material as a humorous approach to a political topic.¹⁷ More recently, in the S/S '18 collection, AW released a “#WhereIWang” campaign, in which celebrity influencers, including Kaia Gerber and Zoe Kravtitz, shared after-party stories involving AW garments (Fisher, 2018)¹⁸.

The social media campaign for PLÁSTICO will merge humor and celebrity endorsement. While the usage of influencers is a ubiquitous marketing tool in the US, this is a novel concept in the Latin American industry. Karol Conka, feminist rapper known for her athletic lifestyle and empowering messages, blogger Julia Santos, known for her knowledge of international labels, plus-size model Fluvia Lacerdia, and *Victoria's Secret* angel Adriana Lima would be prime candidates for the face of the campaign (Thomas, 2018). Similar to AW's “#WhereIWang” campaign in 2018, photos of these diverse influencers at beach festivals will be distributed on AW's digital platforms. In the captions, they will share how they feel proud of their body and closest to their skin in this new line due to the environmentally-friendly content.

Communicating PLÁSTICO to the Consumer: DTC Experiential Retail

Capitalizing upon the “see-now, buy now” ideology, AW follows their intricately-curated campaigns with direct-to-consumer consumption opportunities. As Wang himself articulated to *WWD*, luxury represents “status [and] exclusivity.... There are obviously certain things I feel like I connect to, but... I can extract certain elements of what it means to be a high-level designer luxury brand and deliver it on a different type of platform” (Iredale, 2018). For instance, after

¹⁷ See Figure 2.

¹⁸ See Figure 3.

their S/S '17 runway, AW converted the pre-show model trailer into a mobile pop-up, making runway pieces accessible immediately after the show. Revolutionizing NYFW, the company also catered *McDonald's* and *7/11* slurpees, urging the crowd to join the “Wang Fest” (Phelps, 2017). By positioning experiential retail as a central pillar of their marketing strategy, AW allowed consumers to feel as if they are joining a lifestyle rather than investing in a commodity.

As another case in point, AW advertised their second Adidas Originals collaboration launch, which fused hip-hop culture and cycling gear, through a text message chatbox. As Wang articulated to *Vogue Magazine*, “The activation is just as important as the products, because it really speaks to the narrative and the concept” (Yotka, 2017). Posters on the Lower East Side in Manhattan contained access codes to all twenty-seven items; immediately after texting the number, an AW representative would cycle to the consumer’s location and drop off the product.

Most recently, AW launched their F/W '18 collection, inspired by the notion of the female CEO, with an interactive in-store experience. Advertised through Instagram posts and stories encouraging “Alpha Female” customers to rush to the flagship,¹⁹ the collection was launched with a cocktail party. All the garments and cocktail glasses, embellished with “CEO” in metal, were displayed in front of a mirror installation covered in slogans, such as “WANG GANG,” “NEW COLLECTION LIT,” and “ALPHA BOSS.” Store representatives encouraged customers to add messages about female CEO empowerment onto the mirror in lipstick.²⁰

With the launch of PLÁSTICO by AW, the brand will host another pop-up marketing event. According to *WGSN*, Brazil’s summer festivals are key purchasing opportunities in the

¹⁹ See Figure 4.

²⁰ See Figures 5, 6, and 7.

Brazilian swimwear industry (Fenton, 2018). The pop-up will build upon various US fashion companies' recent marketing events, such as American social digital media and entertainment company *Refinery29*'s recent "29 Rooms" pop-up. Open for two weeks in September 2018, this "interactive funhouse" showcased a series of installations by various visionaries, from local artists to corporate companies. Larger corporate apparel and cosmetic labels, such as Aldo, Revlon, Reebok, and Dr. Jart, respectively, marketed their new collections with a sneaker-inspired arcade, personalized lipstick consultation booth, a women's empowerment-themed installation, and an exhibit that replicates the skincare lab.²¹ The exhibits both advertised their new collections and presented photo opportunities in order to increase social media traction. Similarly, AW will host cocktail bars and sell limited samples of the collection at Rio Music Carnival, a high-profile Brazilian festival that unites arts, entrepreneurship, and music. The carnival will be a highly visible opportunity for various entrepreneurial and artistic groups to gather and represent the company image. Additionally, it will be an affordable way to utilize experiential retail to access the target consumer and gain social media traction.

By coupling a social media campaign featuring key Latin American influencers with a pop-up launch at Rio Music Carnival, *AW* will garner the attention of Brazil's affluent, rave-centric Millennials. *PLÁSTICO*'s sustainable production and digital branding will cater to their body-positive and environmentally-conscious ideology, offering an innovative new product assortment to Brazil's swimwear market.

²¹ See Figures 8, 9, and 10.

APPENDIX

Reference Photos.

Figures 1. Logo Commodification at S/S ‘18 Runway Show. Retrieved on April 19, 2018 from <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2018-ready-to-wear/alexander-wang>



Figure 2. Marketing Campaign for Souvenir Collection on AW’s Instagram in June 2018. Retrieved on June 4, 2018 from <https://www.instagram.com/alexanderwangny/>



Figure 3. #WhereIWang Campaign Utilizing Celebrity Endorsement in S/S ‘18. Retrieved on May 09, 2018 from <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/designers/a19135212/alexander-wang-spring-2018-ads/>



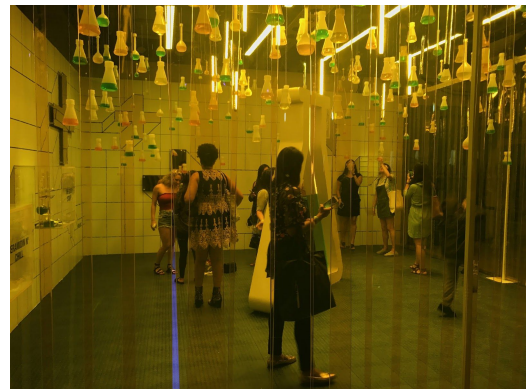
Figure 4. Social media posts advertising F/W ‘18 launch event on AW’s Instagram. Retrieved on September 01, 2018 from <https://www.instagram.com/alexanderwangny/>



Figure 5, 6, and 7. Fall '18 Alpha Female Launch Event at AW flagship store, New York, NY. September 27, *Personal*



Figures 8 and 9. Aldo and Dr. Jart experiential retail pop-ups at 29 Rooms, New York, NY. September 8, 2018, *Personal*



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