

FIT, IBM and Tommy Hilfiger Get into AI for Fashion Design

The pilot project is an innovative approach to product development and marketing fashion faster.

By [David Moin](#) on January 14, 2018

[Tommy Hilfiger](#), IBM and The Fashion Institute of Technology Infor Design and Tech Lab are collaborating on a project utilizing artificial intelligence to “identify and facilitate fashion trends that will resonate with shoppers before they appear on the runways of New York, London, Milan and Paris,” WWD has learned.

Officials involved in the project say it’s designed to help the next generation of retail leaders better meet the needs of customers, be quicker to capitalize on the latest trends, hasten the product development cycle, and to provide students with “a high-impact learning experience.”

“IBM approached us with an opportunity to re-imagine the business of fashion and retail,” said Michael Ferraro, executive director of the F.I.T Infor Design and Tech Lab. “The prospect of this collaboration was exciting and exactly [fit](#) the mission of the F.I.T Infor Lab which is part of F.I.T.’s move toward becoming an innovation center for creative industries worldwide.” Ferraro

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added that working with Hilfiger and IBM was a “perfect opportunity to provide students across three majors – textile development and marketing, fashion design, and international trade and marketing for the fashion industries – with advanced technology that will equip them to become the visionary fashion professionals of the future.”

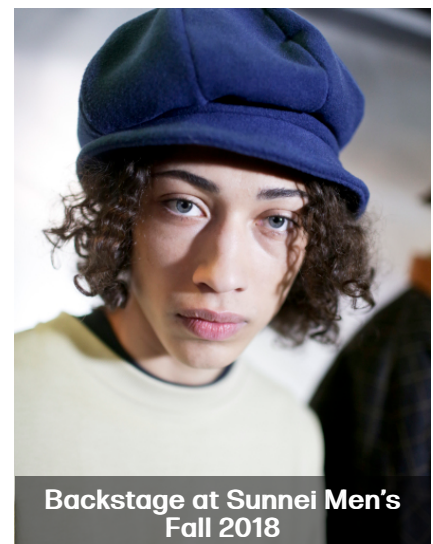
Asked about the possibility of commercial applications from the project, Ferraro replied, “[Tommy Hilfiger](#) is currently evaluating any further action from the outcomes of the project...However, we have already received inquiries and interest in replicating a similar incubation project and believe strongly that there are infinite applications for custom, tech-infused and IA-inspired fashion.”

Steve Laughlin, general manager of IBM Global Consumer Industries, added, “Although there were no commercialized products from the pilot, it advances how we address a key change in the industry. Making trend predictions more accessible and getting products to market faster means fewer lost sales. For consumers, when a desired item is not immediately available in store or online, the sale will not occur.”

Supply chain models are decades old and on average require 12 months to go from initial design sketches to a product hitting the sales floor, according to Laughlin. “AI can help improve overall lead times by generating efficiencies along the entire supply chain and we have seen incredible opportunity to accelerate the initial product design process,” said Laughlin.

“In the world of fashion we have looked at design teams that continually look to spot trends from market trips, runway shows, fashion archives and social media influencers. This is a very time-consuming, resource intensive manual process that can only be solved by giving employees more information.”

The pilot utilized IBM research capabilities including computer vision, natural language understanding, and deep learning techniques specifically trained with fashion data. These AI



capabilities produced key silhouettes, colors and a new “neural network” that designs novel prints and patterns. according to those involved in the project.

So far, six designs emanating from the project and incorporating AI-generated patterns, trending colors and silhouettes, were shown to Hilfiger, and three are being showcased at the National Retail Federation convention being held today through Tuesdsy at the Jacob Javits Convention Center on Manhattan’s west side. Hilfiger is among the speakers participating at the NRF event.

To create the designs, FIT students were given access to IBM’s AI tools, thousands of Hilfiger’s product images and thousands of patterns from fabric sites to inspire 3D digital designs. The students are learning to use tech to identify trends that may resonate with shoppers before they appear on the runways. Their designs were presented to Phillips Van Heusen and IBM executives and a Tommy Hilfiger designer. And the group felt the best design was a plaid tech jacket by [FIT](#) senior Grace McCarty. She incorporated a special thread embedded in a removable, “futuristic” plaid panel with IBM’s Watson’s Tone Analyzer that responds in near real time to the sentiment in a customer’s social media accounts. When designing her look, she drew inspiration from the AI-produced insights on Tommy’s brands’ style and silhouettes, as well as popular and trending colors, and AI-generated novel patterns.

Among those involved in the project is Hui Wu, a researcher at the IBM T.J. Watson Research Center who is involved with the application of artificial intelligence to fashion design and predicting trends.

Regarding Hilfiger, Laughlin said the designer and his company has been “at the forefront of transforming the retail industry and exploring the intersection of fashion and technology. For example, they launched ‘TommyNow’ a see-now, buy-now model that shortens the typical 18-month production process into just six months.”

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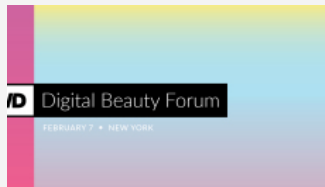
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