

# Fashioning a Knowledge Intensive Entrepreneur?

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## ABSTRACT

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This PhD dissertation explores fashion design graduates as potential knowledge-intensive entrepreneurs through the relationship between knowledge and other resources, and different pathways post-graduation. Explorative qualitative studies are used to analyse how fashion designers reflect and act after graduating from fashion school, applying theories about knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intentions. Recent graduates from the BA and MA programmes in fashion design at the Swedish School of Textiles, University of Borås, were interviewed in order to gain insights on their initial choice of pathway, as well as how their acquisition and development of new knowledge and other resources affects these choices over time. Findings from this case study show that fashion designers commonly express entrepreneurial intentions at the time of graduation; however, they have low levels of perceived feasibility of being able to realise the intention, which initially also leads to low levels of actual venture creation. Hence, the fashion designers take different pathways, specifically 1) KIE venture creation; 2) enter existing fashion firms; 3) continue in academia; and 4) leave fashion.

Through follow-up interviews after two years, I can observe that the acquisition of knowledge related to market, business, and creativity, as well as changes in the perception of how to access resources necessary for venture creation leads to higher levels of perceived feasibility. Furthermore, a desire for creative freedom, as to apply one's creative knowledge more extensively, increases these fashion design graduates' perceived desirability of becoming entrepreneurs. This research extends and gives further insights to results from existing literature on knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship and creative industries, where it has been shown that entrepreneurs within this sector have less industry experience, depend more on private funds in financing the venture creation, and that the ventures in general stay small in size. The PhD dissertation concludes by suggesting a dynamic conceptual model for the relation between knowledge acquisition, perception of accessing resources, and founder characteristics in affecting entrepreneurial intentions over time, thereby shaping future pathways for fashion designers.

**Keywords:** knowledge intensity, entrepreneurship, fashion, higher education, creative industries, creative knowledge, entrepreneurial intentions

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