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Abstract

**The firm in haute couture: Paris fashion’s enterprises and capital from the 1900s to the 1960s**

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This paper explores the history of the firms, their form, and capitalization in the haute couture industry located in Paris. Research for this paper is based on business archives kept at the French national archives, the City of Paris archives, and to a lesser extent, the British national archives.

This paper focuses on a period of a little more than a half century, from the last years of the nineteenth century to the end of the golden age of haute couture, during the 1960s. During those years, a few dozen firms had a profound creative influence over women’s fashions internationally. This paper aims to shed light on the type of societies that were founded and developed by haute couture entrepreneurs, on the ownership and management of these firms, and on their financial capital.

In so doing, this paper will examine the strengths and limitations of the firms in the Paris haute couture cluster. It will also examine their business models, and propose a timeline for the evolution of these business models, assessing, whenever possible, their successes, failures, and profitability.