In Mr Holmen’s commission agency there is, like I had jolly well thought, nothing à la mode, except for some gold and silver braid and lace. I have inquired about the strap buttons...

In September 1653, the person who complained so much about there not being anything ‘à la mode’ in Stockholm was Johan Ekeblad, one of the noblemen of the court of Queen Christina. The plague had prevented shipping and, with that, the import of new fabrics and accessories. Ekeblad complains about ‘the smallest of goods package not having arrived here’. The lack of fashion news caused problems for anyone who was anxious to dress in the latest fashion.

News and Communication Patterns

In seventeenth-century Sweden, there was a growing demand for information about what was going on in Europe within culture, science, and in the commercial field. Fashion, as I am going to demonstrate, also belonged to this group. However, was information about clothes, art, music, and science really seen as news in early modern Europe? Were such things regarded as news in a world without any real mass media?

How do we know if something has been regarded as news? The current price of fish is probably news for fishermen and fish buyers in a coastal area, but perhaps not for young people gathered at the activity centre Fryshuset in Stockholm. What is regarded as news is linked to time, space, and social context. However, so that information will be regarded as news, more is required than it just being informative. It could be said that news is information:

- about something new or something previously unknown;
- which is of interest to a large group;
- which is not intended to last for any long period;

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2 Ekeblad 2004.
which is up to date, ‘the latest’;
which is circulated by way of the quickest available medium;
which contributes to new media being invented in order to increase the speed of the dissemination of news.

In this chapter, fashion is discussed in relation to this definition of news and in light of the seventeenth-century media revolution. How was fashion regarded in early modern Sweden? How was the information about this disseminated and how was the information used? Who were involved in this? What did the establishment of the postal service signify for fashion consumption in Sweden?

The Dutch historian Jan Willem Veluwenkamp has studied the communication patterns within international trade. He has pointed out that international trade presupposes communication with people in far-off places. During the early modern period, there were, he points out, two basic ways of communicating with one’s business contacts. One was to travel to the person with whom you wanted to do business, or possibly send a representative, and the other was to send letters. The latter was considerably cheaper and simpler, provided that there was a reliable way of delivering the letters. Veluwenkamp believes that, when the postal system was established in Europe, a large number of the business contacts became postal. ³ Milja van Tielhof, who has studied the European corn trade, has put forward a similar view. She believes that there is a direct causal link between the establishment of the postal system in the Baltic Sea region and the Dutch corn trade in the same region. ⁴ The postal service radically changed the terms of trade.

The communication channels that Veluwenkamp includes for early modern Europe also applied, as I see it, to the consumers who wanted to have trade and commercial news. Clothing fashion is a good example of such news, since it is strongly linked to trade and manufacture, at the same time as there is a great demand for the latest news. Fashion’s principal characteristic is that it changes quickly. ⁵ What is regarded as up-to-date news depends on the speed of the available media.

To travel yourself in order to find out the year’s fashion was both expensive and time consuming and hardly a viable alternative for many. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, those who travelled back and forth from Stockholm to the Continent had to allow for it taking months. Those who had friends and acquaintances who came home from trips and could recount what was in vogue that season were lucky. The third way of being informed about the year’s fashion was in letter form. Before the postal service was established in the Swedish Empire, it was principally the royal family and the country’s leading aristocracy who

³ Veluwenkamp 2006, pp. 121, 130 seqq.
⁵ Kavamura 2007, p. 21.
could expect a fairly steady delivery of letters. For others who had to use travelling in order to deliver the letters, it was impossible to know in advance whether the letter took a few weeks to deliver, or several months.

Letter writing greatly evolved in Europe during the early modern period. Letters were no longer something that was principally exchanged between statesmen and/or men of the cloth. Merchants, craftsmen, academics, artists, and many other groups increasingly used the letter for business, scholarly discussions, and exchanging information and thoughts. The centre and the periphery were linked together with the help of the letter. Permanent networks were, Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond underscore, developed for social and cultural exchange throughout Europe by way of correspondence. The expansion of the postal service made it possible to always remain in contact, even from afar. Therefore, the expansion of the postal service must have also resulted in the merchants and the craftsmen who worked in the clothing industry being given totally new opportunities for keeping abreast of the changes in fashion.

The letter was also a new way of privately being together with relatives and friends who were living in other parts of the country or in Europe. Bonds of friendship were formed and strengthened in a new way with letters which were regularly exchanged. However, it also affected the interests and actions of people. Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, who have studied women’s letter writing during the early modern period, point out that the aim of the letters was nearly always practical and concrete; the letter writer wanted to cause the recipient of the letter to act or react. The content of both women’s and men’s letters was news about politics, family matters, financial issues, accidents, culture, and many other things. Fashion, as I will show, was also one of these often-written pieces of news.

In order that the new communication system would work within the fashion industry, trust was of fundamental importance. It applied to trust in business contacts and other people who were in far-off places, as well as in the actual postal system. Both those who spread information as well as news and news consumers had to be able to rely on a system which they did not control. It was important that letters and other items of mail actually reached their destination, and on time. Therefore, the post had to be regular, relatively quick, and predictable. Swedish merchants and consumers had to also be safe in the knowledge that the goods and services they had ordered were actually delivered. Here, it was about business contacts having the same trust in the written order from a person they had never met, as the order placed face to face. It was a new kind of trust which applied less to the person and more to the organization itself.

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7 Couchman & Crabb 2005, p. 3.
8 Bouza 2007, p. 146.
9 Droste 2006a, pp. 135–148.
Even when it concerned the payment system for supplying news and goods, trust was of central importance. The suppliers had to be assured that they would be paid for their services and goods, and that it would be done within a reasonable period. If we look at fashion from this perspective, the forms of supplying fashion news and fashion items would only change, at the same time as trust in far-away business contacts, the delivery of letters, and the payment system had reached a certain level. This, in turn, presupposed a well-functioning communication system.

Information about Clothes or Fashion News?

My dear sister Margaretha […] if she now wants to know all sorts of current news and fashions, then she can find out from sister Kristina Ugglä. She is heading down there…

The year was 1652 and Margaretha Ekeblad, living in the province of Västergötland, wanted to know something about the latest fashion. In a letter to her brother Johan, she had sent word that she wanted to obtain information about the latest fashion news in Stockholm. The brother sent word back that instead of a letter she would receive the latest news conveyed by their cousin Kristina Ugglä, who was on her way down to Västergötland. For those who wanted to keep abreast of the latest fashion, it was important to utilize all possible channels. The personal meeting allowed scope for more detailed information. Those who travelled had to always keep themselves abreast of the news and be prepared to convey it to those who were interested. However, not everybody had relatives and friends who came bearing news every season. What other information channels were then available to those who were interested in the latest fashion?

In the seventeenth century, the fashion magazine was still an unknown phenomenon. The first French fashion magazines were published not until the latter part of the eighteenth century, and not until the nineteenth century were the first Swedish fashion magazines published. Prior to then, it was, however, possible to obtain information about clothes and fashion in a number of different ways. One such source of information were the so-called costume books. They began to be more generally popular in Europe during the latter part of the sixteenth century. Cesare Vecellio’s costume book, which was published for the first time in 1590, was one of the more well known. In it, there are around five hundred wood engravings which show costumes from all over the world. At the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, a similar costume book is preserved. It was published in

10 Ekeblad 1911, p. 127.
11 Vecellio 1860.
Nuremberg by Hans Weigel and Jost Amman in 1577. These books were large, expensive, and exclusive. They displayed clothes from different countries, for various social groups and different occasions during the second half of the sixteenth century, but hardly the latest fashion news. They showed the costume, but not the fashion, and can hardly be regarded as a news medium.

Mannequins were dolls, usually made of wax, sometimes of wood, porcelain or silk-wrapped metal wire, coiffured and dressed according to the latest fashion. As early as 1391, the first-known mannequin was mentioned, which, at that time, was sent by messenger from France to the queen of England. In Sweden during the seventeenth century, these dolls were usually called ‘tailor’s dummies’ (gerningsdocka), since they were principally designed to show how the new designs were to be sewn. The leading Parisian fashion boutiques on rue Saint-Honoré began in the seventeenth century to arrange a more widespread distribution of mannequins. Usually the dolls were small, 15–20 cm, but during the eighteenth century there were also life-size mannequins or Pandoras. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the organization was so well established that dolls, dressed in the latest designs, were sent every month to ‘all corners of Europe’. The French fashion historian Daniel Roche emphasizes that the dolls were deemed so important that, at the outbreak of war, they were granted diplomatic immunity and could be given a military escort in order to ensure their safe arrival at the courts of Europe.

It is not known when the mannequins began to be sent to Sweden. The oldest preserved mannequin in the country is from the 1590s, and it is found in the Royal Armoury. Probably it belonged to Christina of Holstein-Gottorp, Charles IX’s second consort. There is much to suggest that during the seventeenth century mannequins were also popular outside the court; in Sweden, there were many fashion consumers with inquiring minds. In 1634–35, the Frenchman Charles Ogier noted on numerous occasions that the Swedish aristocracy was dressed in the new French fashion. When Lorenzo Magalotti, from Florence, visited Sweden in 1674, he also noted the Swedes’ fashion interest. He pointed out that, at that time, not only men and women of the nobility had adopted the Paris fashion, but also middle-class women.

The dolls did not come by post to Sweden; they were both too big and too fragile to be carried by postilions on foot. The Swedish fashion boutiques received

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13 For a presentation of the difference between costume and fashion, cf. Stadin 2005, pp. 31-32, and the literature cited there.
16 Roche 1999, p. 475.
17 Tydén-Jordan 1987, p. 5.
18 Ogier 1978, p. 84, cf. also p. 108.
19 Magalotti 1986, p. 11.
the dolls with the deliveries of fabrics and accessories that came to Sweden on-board merchant vessels. Otherwise, it was probably travelling commission agents and other travellers who transported the much-sought-after dolls.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, mannequins were a well-known phenomenon in Sweden.\(^{20}\) Aside from the court, the fashion boutiques in Stockholm were subscribers.\(^{21}\) Later these dolls came to be distributed to ever-wider groups by way of them becoming popular presents among Europe’s nobility and middle class.\(^{22}\) The advantages of the mannequins were that they displayed all the garments, inside and out, and how they were sewn. The disadvantages were that they were fragile and expensive to transport, and, not least, they could not be sent by post. During the course of the eighteenth century, they, therefore, came to disappear from the news market.

Card games could actually also be of help to those who wanted to know something about how people were dressing on the Continent. The playing cards were sometimes painted with topical fashion pictures. In the remarkable art cabinet that Gustav II Adolf was presented with on his visit to Augsburg in 1632, such a card game can be found.\(^{23}\) These cards are decorated with fashionable clothing from the second half of the 1620s.\(^{24}\) The card games were small and could easily be carried on the journey or sent in a letter. Moreover, they were considerably cheaper and more easily accessible than costume books. Playing cards showed last year’s fashion.

Was this regarded as news? We do not know for sure, but prior to the establishment of the postal service in Sweden in 1636 information about last year’s fashion, or even that of the last few years, was definitely topical news. Of interest in this context is during the 1620s and 1630s Hamburg stood out as a fashion centre, especially for Swedish men. From here news was obtained and costumes in the latest fashion were ordered.\(^{25}\) Perhaps this can be linked to the courier service established between Stockholm and Hamburg in 1620. The service was principally intended for the letters of the Crown, but here also merchant letters and other post were permitted.\(^{26}\) There is, therefore, much to suggest that this courier service helped to make conveying fashion news considerably quicker than before. When Hamburg was established as Sweden’s media centre on the Continent, the city, for a period, also became a fashion centre for the Swedes.

The postal service gave the opportunity to send letters, but also newspapers and other news media. During the latter part of the seventeenth century, maga-

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\(^{20}\) Svedberg 1941, pp. 271-272.
\(^{21}\) In Copenhagen, the fashion boutique Louise Rosset had the exclusive right to display the mannequins. Broby-Johansen 1966, p. 101.
\(^{22}\) Roche 1999, p. 474; Steele 1998, p. 25.
\(^{23}\) The Augsburg Art Cabinet and its curious contents are today at Uppsala University.
\(^{25}\) Rangström 2002, pp. 72 seqq.
\(^{26}\) Olsson 2008.
zines which could be sent by post began to appear. In France, it was possible to send for some different magazines that contained fashion news and brief comments about the clothing fashion of the time. Particularly in the French satirical press, for example *Le Courier français* and *La Muse historique*, it was possible to read about fashion. Often it was through the eyes of moralistic fashion critics that the fashion was discussed, so it was important to read the newspaper with the right eyes. However, for the interested fashion consumer there was news to be had.

In the magazine *Le Mercure galant*, which was first published in 1672, there were, on the other hand, regular fashion articles. In the first year of publication, it was reported that it was no longer the court at Versailles, but Paris which was the fashion capital of Europe. In 1687, there was, for example, an article on Charlier’s production of exclusive fabrics and other textiles. Those who were not in Paris, or, for that matter, had not seen the described garments, could find it hard to use these reports, since only in exceptional cases did they contain illustrations. Throughout the seventeenth century, there were altogether twelve fashion plates in *Le Mercure*. There is, however, no doubt that it was about fashion as news.

From the 1670s engraved fashion plates began to reach a wider public. Henri Bonnart was one of the Parisian engraving companies that specialized in fashion plates and engraved pictures of celebrities dressed in the latest fashion. The plates could be ordered from Paris, separately or in a whole series. The collection *Deverse mode nouveau & ancien* was published in two volumes of a hundred engraved leaves each, the first with men’s clothes and the second with ladies’ clothes. In Sweden, at least one copy of this large collection is preserved. It was found in Rosersberg Palace, which, for a long time, belonged to the Oxenstierna family. For the empire’s upper aristocracy fashion was important, something that came at a price.

Usually the plates, however, were in considerably small series. Those interested could subscribe to the plates that were sent monthly or quarterly by post. The fashion plates were both cheaper to make and easier to send than the wax dolls. Another advantage, for both the tailors and those interested in fashion, was that the pictures were supplemented with an explanatory text. They were relatively cheap and, moreover, had a format that made it possible to use the postal system. During the eighteenth century, fashion plates came to be the most popular way of spreading information about fashion. It was a new medium that was invented to make supplying news both cheaper and quicker.

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29 Roche 1999, p. 479.
30 Bonnart 1674–1696.
31 Roche 1999, p. 475.
Through the establishment of the postal service, not only the form, by which the information on fashion was conveyed, was changed, but also the time it took to obtain the latest information. When the Swedish postal service had been established, expanded, and linked to the Continental postal service, Stockholm’s fashion-conscious population was able to receive news about the latest Paris fashion within two to three weeks. The news, more or less, reached Riga just as quickly. In Finland and the Swedish countryside, people had to wait an additional couple of days or a week for the latest news. Through the postal system, the Baltic Sea region came, in a totally different way than before, to be incorporated into the European cultural group. News about fashion, culture, and similar issues—of interest to, above all, the nobility, the upper-middle class, and the clergy—reached Sweden from the European metropolises with a speed not seen before. Inhabitants of the Swedish Empire no longer needed to risk appearing to be Europe’s ignorant and badly dressed country bumpkins. They could now find out what was going on and what mattered.

Fashion Boutiques and Fashion Goods

However, it was not enough to know what was à la mode, as the term goes; it was also important to acquire the new fabrics, plumes, buckles, and the rest which were prescribed according to the latest fashion. The royal family and other court dignitaries often instructed diplomats and other representatives to purchase and send home fabrics and other fashion goods. Political matters were often combined with the position of fashion buyer. Envoys from many European countries had similar tasks. As late as the latter half of the eighteenth century, purchasing fashion goods in Paris and other cities on the Continent for the court could be included in the duties of the ambassadors and other officials. For the rest of the population, relatives and friends travelling in Europe were a way of obtaining new, sought-after goods. Sometimes they themselves took with them fabrics and other items in their luggage. However, where larger consignments were concerned, they were sent in boxes onboard merchant vessels. Smaller packages could be sent by the Ystad–Stralsund postal boat that entered service in 1683. However, within Sweden packages were not sent by normal post. Not until a stagecoach service was started between Ystad and Stockholm in 1720, can it be expected that it was possible to send postal packages the whole way.

In Stockholm and the other large cities of the empire, there were boutiques that sold fabrics, lace, ribbons, hats, and other accessories. However, fashion

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32 Simonson 2009b, p. 388-389
33 Bäumel 2002; Rangström 2002a, p. 154; Stadin 2005, p. 139; Deak 2007, pp. 116, 120.
34 Rangström 2002b, pp. 215, 231.
35 Stadin 2006, pp. 122-123.
36 Heurgren 1964, p. 15.
37 Droste 2009a, p. 76.
boutiques in Sweden were not permitted to sell off-the-peg clothes. They were the privilege of the tailors and were not allowed to be sold in the boutique. 38 These boutiques, however, had mannequins for sale, which the customers could buy or be inspired by in the boutique, and here there were often the latest fashion plates.

In the early seventeenth century, the merchant Lorenz Kruse was often hired with regard to deliveries of fashion goods to the Swedish court. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Hans Bremer’s and Holmén’s fashion boutiques in Stockholm were, in particular, talked of, and their services were often hired by the court and other fashion-conscious consumers. 39 However, there were also other shops that offered the more exclusive goods for sale. So, for example, among her many different companies, the Mistress of the Robes Maria Sofia De la Gardie also owned a fashion boutique. There is little information about it, but it appears principally to have been aimed at the needs of women. 40 There is also information about a fashion boutique in Uppsala in the 1650s and there were presumably such boutiques also in other large towns. 41

The goods in these boutiques were purchased from different places in Europe. In the 1620s and early 1630s, German suppliers, for example Sebastian Lelij in Hamburg, were often hired. 42 In the middle of the seventeenth century, Paris had established itself as Europe’s fashion capital and, at that time, it was goods from French fashion companies that were sought after by the Swedish fashion consumers. In France and, in particular, Paris, gold and silver fabrics, silk in a number of different qualities and quantities, velvet, lace, and a number of different accessories were purchased. One of the more esteemed manufacturers was Monsieur Charlier, whose goods were sought after by all of Europe’s elite. 43 Through the expansion of the postal service in the whole of Europe, news about the Paris fashion was spread to an extent and at a speed not seen before. And the news created a demand for the French goods.

The Postal Service and the Fashion Consumer – An Example

For those who lived in the Swedish countryside, it could be particularly difficult to acquire the desired goods. For them, family members and other relatives who were staying in Stockholm or travelling in Europe were a way of getting help

38 Wottle 2006, pp. 127 seqq.
40 Björkman 1994, pp. 103 seqq. Maria Sofia De la Gardie was one of the empire’s biggest entrepreneurs. Her other companies consisted of the most varied lines of business, such as a papermill, a brassworks, a clothes production, an oil mill, a coal mine, a cloth mill, a logging export company, a herring boat with direct selling in the port of Stockholm, a shipping business, a money-lending business, and many other things.
with the purchases. In letters, they stated what they wanted with the hope that the representative chose the right one for them. Those who travelled were often instructed to purchase fabrics, jewellery, and sometimes complete made-to-measure costumes for their kinsfolk or client.\textsuperscript{44} The correspondence between Johan Ekeblad and his brother Claes illustrates how Swedish noblemen could go about acquiring the latest fashion goods.

Claes Ekeblad, who was living in Västergötland, was planning a wedding for the summer of 1654. As early as September the previous year, Claes started to arrange his bridegroom’s outfit. Through his brother Johan, who worked at the court, he ordered fabrics and other goods. Claes wanted to have a beautiful white fabric for both his jacket and trousers and Johan found both silk satin and a fabric called tabby that could be suitable. In the letter, he enclosed small samples of both fabrics and quoted the price.

Johan regretted that there was, however, hardly anything that ‘is à al mode’.\textsuperscript{45} His brother had to be patient until new deliveries had arrived. Even if the information about the latest fashion came to Sweden by post, it could take a while before the required goods reached Sweden. Quarantine regulations in conjunction with the plague and other diseases, ice, heavy winds, and other factors could delay the merchant vessel by several weeks. The regularity of the flow of news, which, in the middle of the seventeenth century, had been created within the postal system, could not be maintained within sailing shipping. So if fashion news from Paris reached Sweden within a couple of weeks, it could take considerably longer before the goods reached the country, particularly in the winter. The more up to date the news, the greater the desire to also be able to obtain this fashion news.

The correspondence continued throughout the autumn and winter and Johan described to Claes the latest fashion with regard to different fabrics, braids, plumes, buttons, laces, ribbons, hat styles, as well as prices of all the goods. It was important that everything was right and in the letters they discussed the minutest detail.\textsuperscript{46} Fashion was important to young noblemen and something they liked to talk about.

The correspondence was, however, not only about purchases for the brother’s wedding. Here they discussed family matters, but Johan also wrote a lot about life at the court and sometimes even pure gossip. But fashion and clothes were also a subject that they liked to discuss. Johan wrote about his own clothing problems, but also about other men’s clothes worn at different social functions and their love affair with the latest fashion.\textsuperscript{47} The Ekeblad brothers were, like so

\textsuperscript{44} Stadin 2006, pp. 122-123.
\textsuperscript{45} Ekeblad 2004, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{46} Ekeblad 2004, pp. 104, 111, 115.
\textsuperscript{47} Ekeblad 2004, pp. 20-21, 55, 123, 125, 127.
many young noblemen at that time, anxious to be properly and elegantly dressed according to the latest fashion.

The letter writing was often coordinated with the day when the post came to the town. Sometimes Johan Ekeblad mentioned the urgency to find time on the same day to write a reply by return of post. The post day was an important day that mapped out life a little bit more than previously; a day that everybody kept track of.

In the 1670s, Catharina Wallenstedt, landowner and the wife of a diplomat, arranged her life around the post. On Wednesdays, she spent most of her time reading and writing letters to family, relatives, friends, and business contacts. In many of the letters, she placed orders for fabrics, jewellery, or other fashion goods. She was able to maintain regular contact every week with her husband Edvard Ehrensteen, who worked at the Swedish embassy in London. It was important to discuss the running of their estates, the upbringing of their children, and financial issues, but even patterned English fabrics.

Through the letters Claes was informed about the latest fashion, what were in the capital’s fashion boutiques, and what could be ordered from Paris. He made his choices based on this, but sometimes he left it to Johan to choose. For six months, both brothers devoted many letters to the clothing problems in the run-up to Claes’s wedding. They each wrote approximately two letters a week and in many of them clothes and fashion were discussed. Johan had spent several hours in the fashion boutiques in order to obtain the right fabrics and features for Claes’s outfit according to the latest Parisian fashion.

When Johan had been informed about his brother’s choice in every last detail, he had, in March, procured all that was needed. The Ekeblad brothers had come to an agreement that Claes would send a servant up to Stockholm to collect the large box. Major Drakenberg would foot the bill. Presumably, it was some of the wages due to Claes, which would be used for the outfit. Since, ‘among the people, there is now present an imprudent inquisitiveness to start opening up one’s letters’, the money would not be sent in an ordinary letter.

Johan had heard the rumour that letters had been opened on the way between Stockholm and Västergötland, so they did not have total confidence in the reliability of the postal service. The money, therefore, would not be sent by post.

On the way up from Skara, Claes’s servant would call on the postmaster in Köping. The postmaster could say to whom Drakenberg had entrusted the money. Through the expansion of the postal service, postmasters had a key role in delivering not just the post, but also newspapers, newsletters, and all other information. They were the information centres and media experts of their

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49 Wallenstedt 1995, passim.
time. The postmaster reported that the money had been given to one of Köping’s more prominent merchants. It is not clear whether the postmaster received any remuneration for this information service, but he probably received at least something. Johan Ekeblad requested that the Holmén fashion boutique send the bill to this merchant. At the same time, the merchant in Köping received a letter from Claes’s servant requesting payment to Holmén in Stockholm. Both being merchants, they could trust each other. Here, a form of payment was, thus, used that was based on the trust that existed within the Swedish merchant network.

A week later, the payment was completed and the goods delivered. Johan sent an accompanying letter, in which he apologized for not having managed to acquire some goods. In the same letter, an itemized bill was also enclosed.

The postal service had revolutionized the means by which Swedes followed fashion. From Paris, the news was circulated directly to the fashion boutiques in Stockholm and to the court. From there, the information was passed on to the consumers in the capital and the country via letters and personal contacts. However, the postal service did not function so as to handle direct financial transactions; instead, people put their trust in the established merchant system. The postmaster had, nevertheless, a role as an informant about who handled the payments. As usual, the goods were transported by ship to Sweden, which sometimes meant that the impatient consumers were made to wait for their consignment. In Sweden, the goods were collected by the consumer’s representative on a horse and cart. By utilizing the most reliable and quickest system for news, goods, and payments, the latest fashion could even be spread to the Swedish countryside.

In Which Way Was Fashion Regarded As News?

In the introduction, some criteria were mentioned that can be set in order that information shall be regarded as news. During the seventeenth century, was fashion regarded as news, and, if so, how?

*News is information about something new or something previously unknown*

Fashion concerns information about the latest way of dressing; this was new information for the people of the Swedish Empire. In the 1620s and the early 1630s, it was principally from Hamburg and the surrounding towns that people got fashion news, after that Paris came to dominate. However, fabric news also came from England.

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51 Droste 2006a, pp. 135-136.
News is information which is of interest to a large group

In seventeenth-century Sweden, fashion was not only the concern of the royal family or the court. A growing group of Swedes were prepared to spend time and money in order to obtain fashion news. From having only pertained to the leading aristocracy at the start of the seventeenth century, it was, at the end of the century, not only all of the nobility, but also the upper-middle class dressed in the latest fashion. That being so, the group that was not only interested in fashion news, but also had the means to follow the fashion, had grown considerably. Within the nobility, both men’s and women’s preoccupation with fashion was, at that time, more or less the same.

On the other hand, within the middle class, we begin to be able to see a division between the commercial interest and the personal. Those who purchased in bulk fashion goods in Paris and in other places, sold them in Sweden, made the designs, and worked in the fashion industry in other ways were, more often than not, men. However, within the middle class, it was more often women who dressed in the latest fashion.

News is information which is not intended to last for any long period

Fashion news is not meant to last for any long period. On the contrary, fashion is characterized by rapid change, and that is how it was even in the seventeenth century. The fashion that was in vogue five years ago had no major informational value.

News is information which is up to date, ‘the latest’

Information about the latest fashion has to be up to date. However, what is defined as up-to-date news depends on how quick and accessible the media are. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the fashion of the year or even of the last few years was regarded as up to date. At the end of the century, information about the latest fashion came regularly every month.

News is information which is circulated by way of the quickest available medium

Information about fashion reached Sweden and was circulated there in different ways. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, there were fragile dolls and large costume books that supplied information about costume and fashion. The quickest way for Sweden’s fashion consumers to obtain information was, however, still by way of the older form of communication system: journeys. They could either travel themselves to a fashion centre, or they could also obtain information from a commission agent, a personal friend or a relative who had been where the fashion news originated or where the news had reached prior to Sweden. However, journeys to the Continent were expensive and took a long time.

From the 1620s, the messenger service from Hamburg, and then the establishment of the Swedish postal service in 1636, created the preconditions for a parti-
cularly quicker dissemination of information. The fashion news quickly reached Stockholm and Riga to then be further circulated in all parts of the Swedish Empire. During the seventeenth century, private letters came to be a completely new way of maintaining social contacts. The post day was an important day for everybody who wanted to have fashion news. The postal system’s speed and reliability were crucial in order that it would have such great importance to the dissemination of news.

News is information that contributes to new media being invented in order to increase the speed of the dissemination of news

The fashion consumers’ desire to quickly obtain information about the fashion in the fashion centres of the time helped to create new media. During the Late Middle Ages, the fashion doll was such a medium. Through the establishment of the postal system, new media were created that could more easily be conveyed via the postal system. Among them were magazines and fashion plates, which were distributed throughout Europe every month. At the end of the seventeenth century, fashion news from Paris could reach the Swedish consumers within a couple of weeks.

Thus, the conclusion is that fashion was indeed regarded as news in seventeenth-century Sweden. The establishment of the postal service greatly contributed to the dissemination of this news, facilitated the ordering of goods, and postmasters acted as informants in conjunction with the payments. The fashion news and the role of the postal service in this must also be linked to the concept of trust acquiring a somewhat new significance. It no longer only comprised people, but also a communication system that neither commercial parties nor consumers had control over. The postal service made the Swedes à la mode.