



## WHO WILL BE AMERICA'S NEXT TOP MODEL?

\$2.9 million

Indiana

Department of Defense and National Science Foundation

While the Manhattan Project produced the nation's first super weapon, Project Runway seeks to predict America's next super model.

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) are both underwriting the effort which is officially entitled "Style in the Age of Instagram; Predicting Success within the Fashion Industry using Social Media."<sup>211</sup> Indiana University conducted the study with funding from a \$920,000 NSF grant<sup>212</sup> and a DARPA grant totaling nearly \$2 million.<sup>213</sup>

"Fashion is a multi-billion dollar industry with social and economic implications worldwide," the researchers point out. Models become the faces of the brands they represent, so designers seek out the most popular models.<sup>214</sup> The struggle is real for every casting director, therefore, who "is faced with a seemingly impossible task: predicting whom, out of the hundreds of new faces she may see at the go-see calls, will become the top model of the next season."<sup>215</sup>

Scientific models were designed to forecast female fashion model success based upon shapes, sizes, and social media. Statistics on 400 fashion models, including height, hip, waist, and shoe sizes were gathered along with the name of their modeling agencies from the Fashion Model Directory (FMD) website, a database of professional female fashion models.<sup>216</sup> The information was then combined with the number of followers, posts per month, "likes," and comments on each model's Instagram, a mobile image-sharing social media platform.<sup>217</sup>

The list was narrowed to 15 models labeled as "new faces." The number of runway walks in subsequent fashion shows was counted to determine the popularity of each.<sup>218</sup> "Of the eight models expected to achieve the greatest popularity, six were accurately identified. Of the seven predicted to score lowest in popularity, six were also accurately identified."<sup>219</sup>

The six most popular new models of the Fall/Winter 2015 season were Sofia Tesmenitskaya, Arina Levchenko, Renata Scheffer, Sasha Antonowskaia, Melanie Culley and Phillipa Hemphrey.<sup>220</sup>

Emilio Ferrara, one of the study's authors, says the statistical analysis developed by the researchers "is able to predict the rise to popularity of new fashion models with over 80 percent accuracy!"<sup>221</sup>

Drawing from their calculations, the researchers say "a strong social media presence may be more important than being under contract with a top agency, or than the aesthetic

standards sought after by the industry.”<sup>222</sup> They dubbed the phenomenon “the Kendall Jenner effect.”<sup>223</sup>

Some of the findings may not be quite as clear cut as the authors claim. Models with more Instagram posts did have a 15 percent higher chance of walking a runway, but the study notes “surprisingly, more likes tend to lower the chances of walking a runway” by about 10 percent.<sup>224</sup>

The other findings are far less surprising. A woman is nearly ten times more likely to walk a runway if backed by a prestigious agency.<sup>225</sup>

*New York Magazine*, which boasts following the hottest trends, disputes some of the assumptions used to determine supermodel status, pointing out “walking the most runways might make you popular, but it doesn’t necessarily make you an elite model.”<sup>226</sup> It further notes “the runway, while incredibly glamorized, isn’t necessarily essential to success as a model — Gisele, the sector’s highest-paid talent for many years running now, rarely sets foot on a runway these days, and when she does, it’s headline-making.”<sup>227</sup> Regardless, “getting paid to look at supermodels’ Instagram is indisputably not a bad gig,” exclaims *New York Magazine*.<sup>228</sup>

The authors themselves concede the study does have some limitations. It focuses on just Instagram and did not include other online platforms. It relies only on the number of runways walked to determine popularity while ignoring other factors such as appearances in magazines. And just a small subset of 15 fashion models is used as the basis for the final predictions.<sup>229</sup>



(a) Fashion Model 1



(b) Fashion Model 4



(c) Fashion Model 6



(d) Fashion Model 7



(e) Fashion Model 8



(f) Fashion Model 9

*Scientific models designed to forecast fashion models correctly predicted the success of these six new faces.*

The authors suggest “further research is needed,” noting “an intriguing question that follows up from it is whether Instagram and other social media are indeed changing the traditional notions of beauty.”<sup>230</sup>

Why are government agencies studying the fashion industry in the first place?

“We chose the fashion industry for this research because it represents a strong ‘winner-takes-all’ mentality,” Ferrara explains. “This aspect of survival of the fittest, plus the large

amount of statistical data on professional models, makes it a perfect subject for advancing research on ‘the science of success.’”<sup>231</sup>

While the Pentagon is patrolling the runway and keeping up with the Kardashians, taxpayers are stuck footing the bill.



kendalljenner

FOLLOW

Kendall Jenner

2,529 posts

53.8m followers

169 following



*A strong social media presence may be more important than representation by a top modeling agency or the aesthetic standards sought after by the industry, a phenomenon researchers dubbed “the Kendall Jenner effect.”*